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LOVAT DICKSON'S MAGAZINE

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The Editor will be glad to consider stories offered for publication and will endeavour to return unsuitable MSS. when they are accompanied by a stamped envelope. Neither the acceptance of and payment for a contribution, nor the sending of a proof, can be regarded as a guarantee of publication.

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Editorial Note

IN our first Number we expressed our belief that there are many writers of talent, known and unknown, who would welcome a fresh outlet for their work, and our hope that the reading public also would welcome a Magazine of Short Stories having that indefinable but very real thing, literary quality.

The result of our first two numbers has confirmed both our beliefs : the number of manuscripts submitted has been almost embarrassing, and it is already clear that our difficulty will be, not to find suitable stories, but to select the best among many worthy of publication and to keep the promise we made to unknown writers to give them their chance—as we have made a special effort to do in this January number.

The reading public have given us a welcome quite beyond our expectations, making it necessary to print several times the number planned. The welcome, it is true, has included criticisms, which, however, have given us valuable indications of what people do, and do not, want—for instance, about the same number think that the stories so far published are too highbrow as think that they are too lowbrow, from which

we deduce that we have not yet been far wrong in our selection on that particular point.

One criticism in particular we agree with—that the proportion of stories which can fairly be described as serious or tragic is too high, and this raises an interesting question. It is a fact that the well-written comic story is rare, but why this should be so is not clear, since we all know that the man or woman who will admit to possessing no sense of humour is also rare. We hope the hint will not be lost, so that in future numbers we shall be able to restore the balance between comedy and tragedy.

While we gladly welcome criticism and shall endeavour to profit by it, we have been in no way tempted to depart from the general line of policy we originally laid down for ourselves. We shall continue to print only such new short stories as appear to us to possess real literary merit, especially those which for reasons of length, style or subject might not easily find hospitality elsewhere. By first pleasing ourselves and preserving a reasonable catholicity of taste, we believe we shall best serve the wishes of an ever growing public.

HANS FALLADA

Schuller in luck¹

FLAT country. Trees. No house for miles. And through this unspoiled landscape, as rural as anyone could wish, there wandered a young man, town-clad and ill-tempered. This young man was a tailor's journeyman from the ancient town of Halle an der Saale, but it was not his love of nature that had brought him so far to the pleasant forests of Pomerania. Willi Schuller had long strayed from the paths of virtue. Now the police were after him, and so he wandered aimlessly along, far from the railway, from civilised man, from any cheering prospect—with no money and an aching stomach. The forest refused to end, his stomach refused to be silent, and Willi Schuller's face grew darker and darker. To crown all he tripped over a tree-root, and sat down with a curse on the mossy bed of the forest. But as if in answer to his curse, a melancholy moo resounded close at hand ; twigs began to crack, and as he sprang to his feet a white forehead pushed its way through the hazel bushes. Cow and wanderer eyed each other.

Schuller was the first to break the silence. " Hallo, cow ! " he said. " Come along ! Nice girl, come then ! Nice old moo-cow ! "

¹ Translated from the German by G. E. Halliday.

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"Moo!" said the cow, and came. Schuller saw now why the cow, like himself, was taking a constitutional alone in this vast forest. She had broken out somewhere; the tether was hanging ragged. But there was one other thing he saw. The udder was full to bursting, and even though he did not yet trust his new friend to the extent of lying flat beneath her, his felt hat would serve. And so, in the best professional style, he milked himself a good square meal into his hat. The cow stood still. His stomach said "yes" to the meal and asked for more; that was easily arranged, a second helping was consumed, and the world suddenly looked quite different. The forest was pleasant, the birds were pleasant, and the still forest path was really quite pleasant, too. Better, at any rate, than if policemen frequented it.

Willi Schuller considered the cow somewhat dubiously. Then he waved his hat to shake out the last drops of milk, said with constrained gaiety "Good-bye and thank you, Buttercup!" and set off again along the path. The cow answered "Moo!" and her way was his. Schuller stopped.

"Will you go away, Buttercup!"

The cow looked at him. When he went on, she stretched her neck over his shoulder to make quite sure of keeping touch. And because that was tiresome he took the tether and thought to himself: "Maybe I'll earn a dinner and a night's lodgings as a reward."

After a while the forest cleared. Fields, meadows, a tiny river between willows and poplars, and, to the right-hand side, a farm, revealed themselves to the gaze of Schuller and the cow. The farmer was mowing in a meadow by the path. Schuller did not feel quite easy about walking past the farmer with the cow on the lead; he paid out the tether as far as he could, as if he had nothing to do with the animal,

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hastily muttered " 'Morning ' " and went hurriedly by.

" Hi ! " called the farmer.

Schuller marched on.

" Hey ! " called the farmer. " You there ! That's miller's Black Bess, ain't it ? "

" Yes ? " said Schuller stupidly, and was obliged to stop, for the cow had called a halt.

" Does he want to sell her now, after all ? " asked the farmer. " Are you takin' her to market at Pyritz ? "

" Yes," said Schuller.

" Reckon you're miller's new lad. What's he want for her ? "

" Three hundred," said Schuller, and sweated hard.

" The bletherin' old fool ! " roared the farmer. " An' he wouldn't let me have her for that ! "

" 'Morning," said Schuller, and tugged at the rope.

" Hi ! " called the farmer again. " Hey ! I'll take her for three hundred, and you'll save the road to Pyritz, with cap-money thrown in."

" How much ? " asked Schuller.

" Ten," said the farmer.

" Fifteen," demanded Schuller.

" Done ! " said the farmer. And they shook hands on it.

Later, in the kitchen, after Schuller had pocketed his three hundred and fifteen marks, the farmer stood reflectively turning a five-mark piece over and over in his hand.
" M'yes," he said, slowly.

Schuller was silent.

" It's savin' you goin' to Pyritz, ain't it ? " asked the farmer.

" Yes," said the tailor.

" You might do me a service, and I'll give you five marks. I've sold my bay mare to a farmer, name of Scheel at Puttgarten. Would you take it to him ? "

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"Well——" said Schuller hesitatingly.

"It's a bare hour's walk. Only thing is, you must be careful not to let miller see you, because he thinks you're at market, of course."

"Well, all right," said Schuller, graciously giving in.

"Yes, and be careful not to let miller see you. He wanted the bay too, but Scheel, he'll pay three-fifty."

"I won't let him see me," said Schuller, and rode off. As he rode into the forest he began to whistle. Three hundred and twenty marks in his pocket, a bay mare instead of shank's pony, a full stomach and a full purse—a pleasant world! But soon Schuller stopped whistling. The bay trotted daintily, and Schuller sat deep in thought.

After a while he reached the cross-road which branched left for the water-mill and right for Puttgarten and Farmer Scheel. Schuller rode off to the left. A little valley came, flanked by meadows; once more Schuller saw the tiny river with its willows and poplars, and there, too, was the red roof of the mill. Schuller dismounted, knocked at a window and called "Hello, there!" The door opened and out came the miller.

"Well?" he asked, eyeing horse and rider.

"Morning," said Schuller, and gave the miller plenty of time to have a good look at the bay.

"And how did Voss's bay come by her rider?" asked the miller.

"I'm a tailor," said Schuller, for once in his life telling the truth.

"H'm," said the miller.

"A relation of Voss's," said Schuller, getting back into his normal stride.

"H'm," said the miller again. "And what's that to do with the bay?"

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"My uncle needs some ready money," replied Schuller. "And he wants to know whether you'll take her now for three hundred."

"H'm," said the miller, and considered. He considered a long time. Then he said : "Two-fifty."

Schuller merely said : "No," and prepared to climb on the mare again.

"Wait a minute ! Where're you off to now ? "

"See Scheel at Puttgarten," said Schuller.

"I see ! Scheel, eh ? All right, three hundred then—but no cap-money ! "

"But ——" said Schuller.

"No cap-money ! " said the miller. "Tether the mare and come in so's I can give you the cash."

Schuller had pocketed his money and was drinking a glass of schnapps with the miller, when he heard a commotion and feminine lamentations outside the house ; and immediately afterwards a stout red-faced woman burst into the room and sobbed : "Oh, father, father ! Our cow's lost ! Our Bess is lost ! "

Schuller went hot and cold by turns.

"The devil she is !" stormed the miller. "So you didn't get a new tether ? That's what comes of it ! Our best cow ——" !

The woman sobbed, the miller cursed. Then Schuller, suddenly : "Your cow's lost, is she ? Well, I know where she is ! "

"What ? " they said, open-mouthed.

"She's been at Uncle Voss's clover," said Schuller. "And Uncle's holding her to make good the damage."

"Keeping my cow ? " roared the miller. "That old muddle-head keeping my cow ? I'll show him ——" ! And he burst out of the house, leapt on the bay, and clattered

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down the road, shouting to Schuller: " You follow me along, you ! You're the witness ! " Schuller took good care not to. He counted his money in a quiet corner of the forest, and miscounted again and again with laughing whenever he pictured the encounter—miller with Voss's bay, farmer with miller's Bess, and thus both of them lawfully paid. Schuller laughed for a long time.

But later on, before the magistrate, who could not refrain from laughing either, Schuller said : " It all came by itself, sir, I didn't do a thing towards it. You've only got to have the gift, and you have a lucky day. But I didn't do a thing, sir, really."

The magistrate thought differently.



ELLEN BURGESS

The mills of God

I NEVER thought I should be called upon to write a story. Times without number have I told the tale to neighbours, and even strangers, but telling's one thing, and writing's another, and I never was what you might call a scholar, having left school full early in order to help my mother, her being overburdened with children, and none too strong.

I don't say as I would be starting to write this now, only Mrs. Beamish, who was setting in the parlour last evening watching the little one playing about, said she thought that if I could put down clearly all that had happened, and get one of the magazine gentlemen to print it in a paper that anyone would pick up on a bookstall, the tale might get to the right eyes maybe, and the child benefit.

Advertising would be no manner of good, Mrs. Beamish said. It would cost a mort of money, and perhaps never reach the proper people. So I will try, to the best of my ability, to write down in a straightforward manner all that took place.

To begin with, I am chambermaid at the Dun Cow, though it's truer to say maid-of-all-work, for it's many a long day since two maids was kept, Missus getting on in years and not wanting to be bothered with the work and worry of an

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inn, and master being much in the same state. It's old-fashioned to talk of Master and Missus, I know, but I'm an old-fashioned body, and when I first went to service, nigh on twenty years back, girls had to be respectful, and things was different.

Also Thorpe Slowbridge is a very out-of-the-way place, off the main road, buried some people calls it, and if it wasn't for the newspapers, and motors, and going now and again to the cinema in the market town ten miles away, I don't think we'd hardly know we was alive at all. Then the Dun Cow isn't in the best part for custom, being at the wrong end of the village. The Spotted Dog at the entrance catches most of the motoring folks, and Mr. Brown and his wife are youngish people and smart. They keeps their sign painted, and in the summer sticks a brave show of geraniums in their window boxes, with fresh curtains every year, and these things draws strangers.

The poor old Dun Cow looks like its name, drab and dull, with the signboard swinging and moaning in the wind for all the world like a cow what's lowing for its lost calf. 'Tis a real melancholy sound, but Missus don't mind.

"Us and the Inn's growing old together," she says. "And if folks don't care for us as we are, they kin keep away."

Master's the same. So long as a few old fogies will sit yarning and drinking beer with him o' evenings in the bar, he don't mind how empty the rooms above is. Spiders and mice is the chief of the visitors in them, I often say, and it's a sin to see the mirrors spotted with damp, and the papers peeling off the walls all for a little airing and using. I used to turn the rooms out regular, and ask for fires to be lit now and again, but missus was always putting it aside, and saying "What's the good when nobody comes," and of late I've

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got as slack as they, and just busied myself with cooking for ourselves, and keeping the downstairs tidy.

Jim the Boots does likewise. He's been a smart lad in his time, and a rare hand with horses, but since motors was all the rage he's lost heart in the stables. Half the time, if a motorist pulls up for petrol, we've run out of it ; and then master won't have one of them pump arrangements, so, what with one thing and another, it's not to be wondered at that people give us the go-by, even if they do come to us first, and pass on to the Spotted Dog.

I'm telling all this just to show what a surprise it was when one wild autumn night a great car with glaring headlights came thrashing along and stopped outside.

Missus and me was setting in the parlour, she dozing and me trying to read an old paper by a poor light, for we has naught but oil lamps. I could hear Master's voice droning on and on in the bar. Goodness knows what he and his cronies find to talk about hour after hour, but so they do.

Well, sudden there come a thundering at the door (I'd shut it a while back, for the rain was lashing in something cruel), and Missus woke with a start.

"Drat the folks frightening a body like that," she said peevish; "Go and see to 'em, Janet ; likely as not 'tis someone wanting to ask the way." I went to the door, holding it against the wind, for 'twas blowing powerful strong, and there was a big burly man wrapped in a fur coat, and beating his foot on the step with impatience. I could scarce blame him, for the rain was coming down in torrents, and his fine coat was all getting wet.

"Any vacant rooms ?" he snapped out.

"I'll see, Sir," I said. "Will you step inside ?" for all trades has their tricks, and it wasn't for me to say as every room we had was empty.

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He came in, in the same impatient way, and stood blocking up the narrow passage, and frowning at the delay.

I nipped into the parlour and whispered to Missus : “A gentleman wants rooms—rich, furcoat—shall we take him ? ”

“ Oh, dear ! ” says Missus, vexed. “ What a trouble so late, and naught in the house for supper. Best send him on to the Spotted Dog — ” but while she was grumbling the stranger pushed open the door and said in a loud, masterful voice : “ Have you rooms, or have you not ? My time’s important, and I can’t wait.”

Missus got up and began to explain, but he wouldn’t listen to her wandering talk.

“ Yes or no,” he said, quite savage like. “ Yes ? Good ! Send a man for the luggage then,” and he was off and out into the storm again.

Missus wasn’t any too pleased. She didn’t want to be troubled, but I was glad of a little excitement in our dull life, so I said : “ I’ll see to the room, and cook him a bit o’ supper, if you’ll lay the cloth ; for ’tis nigh on eight o’clock now.”

“ Oh, dear, dear ! ” said she, and went groaning out to the coffee-room, while I ran for a fresh candle, to light him upstairs, for I guessed he’d want to see his room right away.

When I came back, blest if there wasn’t two strangers in the passage, him and a lady, a little thing bundled up in a fur coat likewise, and looking drooping and peaked.

“ You’d like a double room, then, Sir ? ” I said, surprised, my mind working quickly as to which would be the least damp and mouldy—but he cut me short in his sharp way.

“ Anything, anything, but make haste. Will you come up and see ? ” and he turned to his companion.

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She nodded and began to climb the stairs, holding on to the balustrade as though she was dead beat, and walking slowly. I could see this irked the gentleman, who seemed in such a hurry you'd think Old Nick was at his heels.

I went ahead, holding up the candle, which gave a mighty poor light, I must say, but it prevented them seeing the dust and worn stair carpet, so there's good in everything.

I took them to the best room in the front, overlooking the village street. I could hear the old cow moaning on its hinges, but I hoped they wouldn't notice that, and they didn't.

"'Tis a nice feather bed, Madam," said I, talking to keep their attention from wandering about the neglected room. "And I'll put a good fire, and get it all ready while you're having your supper. What would you take for supper, please?"

The lady answered never a word. She walked to the window, and stood looking out into the pitch black night, leaning against the lintel, as though too weary even to sit down.

This put me out, for I thought, "Now she'll hear the old cow groaning, and she won't stop," and for some reason or other I felt most wishful for them to stay. And then I noticed she was just looking without seeing a thing.

She had loosened her heavy coat, and it slipped off her as she stood, and when I saw her figure, I understood her weariness, and wanting to halt on a long journey.

She didn't appear to have heard me, but he answered : "The room's all right, and get what you can for supper."

He turned to her. "This will do, I suppose?"

She said in a low voice : "I suppose anything will do."

He made an impatient sound and looked at his watch.

"You'd like some hot water, Madam?" I asked, partly

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to gain time, for I couldn't exactly place them, and he rapped out quite crossly : " Hot water, of course, and look sharp about it ! "

I had to go then, to fetch the water and towels, and when I came back the gentleman had gone, and she was still standing looking out into the blackness.

I felt rare and sorry for her, her being so young and in a troubrous state. I knew what my mother was like at such times, so I said : " Oh, Madam, let me help you, shall I ? Here's the luggage coming," for I could hear Jim bumping the trunks along the passage. " Can I get out your slippers or anything for you ? "

She just shook her head, but never stirred.

Well, I couldn't linger, I had to get some sort of a meal ready, and I'd planned to light a good fire, and put the bedding before it while they was eating, for I wasn't going to let her run any risk of damp and chill. I waited a minute, but, as she didn't move, I made to go. She put out her hand then to stop me.

" Don't trouble about supper," she said.

" Oh, Ma'am," I cried. " I can get you some nice ham and eggs, with a chop for the gentleman."

She dropped her hand at her side and said very quietly : " The gentleman has gone."

That gave me a bit of a start, but I thought I had misheard her, so I answered quite ordinary : " You mean gone to put the car in the garage, 'm." And she said, looking at me in an odd sort of way : " He has gone for ever."

" Oh, dear 'm," said I. " You must be mistook; you're tired and worn by your travelling. Come down out of the cold and rest in the coffee-room. The gentleman will soon be back."

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I picked up her coat from the floor—a beautiful thing it was, that fur you call sable—it must have cost hundreds of pounds, and laid it about her shoulders.

She was a little thing, with lovely fair hair, all about her face like a frame. She was trembling a bit, but not crying or sad; her blue eyes was as hard as glass, and she had the queerest sort of smile playing about her mouth, as if her thoughts was still far away.

She roused herself, gave a long sigh, then washed her hands, tossed back her hair, and followed me downstairs. Missus had bestirred herself, she'd lit a fire in the coffee-room, and laid the cloth, and was starting to fry some ham and eggs. I didn't let on as the gentleman had gone, nor yet as to the lady's condition. Likely as not Missus would make a shindy, and declare she wouldn't have her, and send her off to the Spotted Dog, late though it was, and somehow I felt there was trouble ahead for that young creature, and 'tis strange; but something made me range myself on her side, though it was but a few moments since I'd laid eyes on her.

But as Missus dished up the ham, she said, matter-of-fact way :

"The gentleman has gone on, said he'd important business and couldn't wait; she was in need of rest. He'll be back to-morrow, no doubt."

"A good deal of doubt, if what she says is true," thought I to myself, but I just nodded and went off with the tray. The lady sat in an armchair by the hearth, her head thrown back, and the firelight playing about her hair. I thought she was dozing, so I moved quietly, and then I saw her eyes were wide open, gazing and gazing, but at naught in the room.

I knew she was weary, so I just whipped the things off

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the big table, and set them on a chair beside her. " Eat your supper here, 'm," I said. " I can tell you're tired to death, and would you like a glass of wine to pick you up ? "

She looked at me then, and said a strange thing : " People in your class are much kinder than people in mine ; the poor live nearer to Nature, and nearer to God."

I thought she was a trifle light-headed, so I answered her as if she was a child, and indeed she didn't look much more.

" Come, my dearie ; you'll be better after you've eaten, and then you shall get to bed."

I waited till I saw her begin to pick at the food, and then I ran off. I made a roaring fire, and gave that musty room a right good dusting, and though it was a stupid sort of thing to do, I went and took a pink geranium in a pot off the bar window-sill, and put it on her bureau to give a welcome like.

By the time the room was warm and the bed made, it looked a different place.

One of her trunks was unlocked, so I took the liberty of taking out her dressing-gown and nightdress, and hanging them over a chair by the fire, and I laid her silver brushes on the dressing-table. Everything she had was of the best and finest ; surely they was wealthy people, and why they should have stopped at the Dun Cow beat me.

She came up while I was finishing and glanced round.

" You put the flower there ? " she said, giving me a searching look. " You are very good."

" I hope you'll be comfortable, 'm," said I, " and sleep well. Shall I call you in the morning, or will you ring ? "

" I'll ring," she answered slowly. " Good-night, and thank you for the plant."

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II

The gentleman did not come back next day nor the day after that, nor yet when a week had passed. I began to wonder whether her words to me was true, and Missus started to get cranky.

Not but what the lady hadn't money in plenty. She paid that first week's bill without so much as looking at the items, and I could see if we'd charged her double it would have been all the same to her. You'd think Missus would be pleased to have such an easy lodger, but not a bit of it. She had learnt about the lady's condition, and she was for ever bewailing the matter, and fretting because she feared the baby would be born at the Dun Cow.

"You can tell she's one of the quality," she kept on saying ; "for she's all so quiet about it, and there'll be a fine pother if she's laid up here. I know what they are at such times. Two nurses belike, and doctor at all hours. Drat the man ! Why don't he come and take her home ?"

I began to feel a bit nervous myself, for anyone could see her time was nigh, and she with nothing ready, and no relations handy, and her husband goodness knows where.

She never mentioned him after that first night, nor did she speak of the baby, and despite her looking so young, there was a proudness about her that kept you from asking her questions, as you might have done to another. Why, for all the fuss Missus made, she didn't go for to tackle her, and it weren't likely I could, though I was terrible sorry for her.

She just went on her quiet way.

She would come down of mornings and sit in the coffee-room, with a book. She was a great reader—would read her eyes out nearly, but she never to my knowledge wrote

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a letter, nor yet received one, and what that gentleman was thinking of to leave her in that manner I couldn't determine. In the dusk she'd go out, wandering about the fields and lanes, till I was all of a dither for fear she'd come to harm, and yet who was I to try and control her? She had been with us for close on three weeks when she said suddenly to me :

“ If I die, Janet, be good to my baby, and if it's a girl be specially good.”

I was tidying the hearth when she spoke and I was so startled I dropped the tongs with a clatter.

“ Oh, M'am,” I cried. “ Don't talk like that! There's no thought of your dying, and anyway you won't be here, so what say shall I have with the baby? Your gentleman will surely take you home before then? ”

She said with a frown : “ I told you he had gone for ever.”

“ Yes 'm,” I answered. “ But who would believe such a tale? Where would be the sense of it? You, a rich lady, with no doubt a grand house and servants, to have your baby in an inn ! ”

She stopped me with one of her proud looks.

“ The Son of God was born in a stable,” said she.

“ Oh, dear, m'am,” I said, distressed. “ Missus and I hasn't liked to name it to you, but now you've spoke, it had best all come out. When is the little one expected, and what arrangements have you made ? ”

She got up and moved to the window, restless like, and said at last in a musing voice.

“ I see there is a doctor in the village, and a district nurse. I shall need no one else.”

That angered me a bit on her behalf.

“ There's a doctor right enough, but he's old and past

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his work, and the nurse is just a visiting body, not suitable for you, 'm. You did ought to let your own folks know how you're placed."

She shook her head.

"It ain't fair on the child," I burst out. "You've signed the register as Mrs. Smith, London, but anyone can see that's not your true name, and London is no address at all."

I daresay I had no right to speak so, but all my thoughts had been pent up and I was bound to let fly.

"It's going to be mighty awkward for us," I went on artfully. "If anything should go wrong, not knowing who to send to or aught about you."

"I have plenty of money," she said steadily. "Enough to pay for everything, whatever happens, and to recompense those who help me."

"Then you won't tell us the rights of the case?" I asked.

She looked at me awhile in silence, then murmured to herself :

"The mills of God grind slowly,
Yet they grind exceeding small."

Missus called me then, and I had to go, leaving her standing gazing out at the sky, with who knows what manner of trouble in her heart.

* * * *

I thought it my duty to tell Missus what had passed, seeing as she'd have to bear the brunt of the upset, and rare and vexed she was by the news.

Master happened to be in the kitchen at the moment and he spoke up quite stern like.

"Hold your noise," he said. "We ain't going to turn any woman away at such a time, let alone a pretty, delicate

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wench like her. If she's no friends it's up to us to stand by her. She shall bide here as long as she likes and the child too."

"And why has she no friends, I'd like to know," says Missus. "There's something queer about such a predicament, and if I had that blackhearted villain here, I'd give him a piece of my mind."

"Ay," said Master grimly. "That I don't doubt; but he ain't here, and she is, and here she'll stop."

Very determined he is at times, the Master, I will say. It was but a few days later that I was clearing away the breakfast things and chatting a bit to cheer her. It was a dull, wet morning and the coffee-room is a drear sort of place at the best. She seemed lonely and listless like, so I ran out to meet the newsboy to get the papers early for her, so as to distract her thoughts.

She always fancied a picture one, and as I walked up the street with it I just took a peep inside. I noticed there was a big Society wedding with portraits of the bride and bridegroom—the Earl of Somebody. Ah, that'll be a little amusement for her, I thought.

I folded the paper again and gave it to her, and then went about my duties. Ten minutes or so later I went back to the coffee-room and I had the fright of my life.

She was lying back in her chair in a dead faint.

There was a to-do, then. I called Missus, and between us we carried her up to her bed, Master lumbering after us with brandy, and we sent Jim for the doctor and nurse.

She was a great while coming round, and what made her go off like that beat us.

"Has she had any shock, any bad news?" asked old Doctor, peering at her; and we told him she had had no letter, nor telegram, nor nothing.

THE MILLS OF GOD

Well—of course that hastened matters, as might have been expected.

We was all kept busy. Jim came back with the nurse. She was a sharp-spoken body, and a bit scornful over the affair. "I've met with these sort of cases before," she said, turning up her nose. "Wedding ring, very likely; anyone can buy one. Where's her husband; that's more to the point?"

"Where he is ain't no business of yours, Nurse," I told her. "You've got to do your best to see her through."

"And I'll thank you to keep a civil tongue Miss Janet," said she. "And clear out of the room, all of you, if you please." But her bark was worse than her bite. She and old Doctor they didn't spare themselves, and a hard and weary day it was for all.

Missus and me was getting meals at odd times, and running up and down stairs, and waiting, and fearing we didn't know what.

And at last, about midnight, we heard a door upstairs opening, and nurse's voice calling over the banisters. "Janet! You're handy with babies; take and bath this one by the fire. I can't leave the mother."

There was a wailing bundle in a blanket in her arms, and I felt a sort of thrill, to think how in a moment of time that young creature had got the name of mother to her.

"How is she?" I stammered, as nurse thrust the baby upon me. "Mortal bad," said nurse, and she whisked off, shutting the door in my face. But I'd only got a few steps away when she came out again with a suit case.

"Baby clothes," she said, and dumped the box down and vanished. Missus was all of a dither about the child. You might have thought she was its grandmother the fuss she made, getting soft towels and scented soap, with a screen round the parlour fire and all.

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And when we opened that box and took out the clothes—why, they might have been made for Royalty. Such lace, and silk, and fine stitching, and on every garment, if you'll believe it, a crown embroidered.

"'Tis a coronet, Janet," said Missus, shaking her head. "I thought as much all along. Eh, 'tis a bad business!"

The baby was a beautiful little thing, and we'd just got her bathed and dressed when nurse came down.

"Give me a bite of supper," she says, "for I'm fair done. And Janet, you go up and set there quietly while I'm away. She's sleeping and comfortable, and I won't be ten minutes. Doctor's gone to telephone to the hospital at Studholme to see if they can spare a nurse, for I can't stop, as you know."

Something made me hide the coronet from her sight. I didn't want no hurtful remarks.

I went slowly upstairs, hushing the little one, and crept into the room.

The lady seemed asleep, and I stood there hesitating whether or no I could lay the baby beside her without disturbing her, when all of a sudden she opened her eyes. When she saw me with her child in my arms, she gave me the sweetest smile—like an angel, then sighed, a gentle sound like the breeze passing over a wheat field, and she turned her head aside, and was gone.

* * *

There's no need to linger over all that happened after. It seemed mazed like to me. She looked right beautiful at rest, so delicate and high born, with her fair hair like silk about her, and so young.

I mind old Doctor standing and looking sadly down at her, for all she was just a stranger to him.

I'd been telling him the story of her coming, and how the gentleman had made off and left her, and never a word of

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the truth could we get from her, and of the crown on the baby's clothes.

"Ah, Janet," said he. "The rich know sorrow and shame as well as the poor. The child's of noble birth, perhaps, but I doubt if it's a right to the coronet," and he added quite low, as if talking to himself:

"She has a lovely face—
God in His mercy send her grace,
The Lady of Shalott—"

and he stooped and kissed her hand.

"Sir, that wasn't her name," I said, for he seemed lost in a dream. "We don't know what her rightful name was."

"Ay," said he, rousing himself. "It will be wanted for the certificate."

"She signed as Mrs. Smith, Sir," I told him. "But she shan't be buried with that to her. Please Sir, just put 'A very brave lady,' for that's what she was," and to my surprise I burst out crying.

* * *

'Twas a sad little funeral. She was buried in the village churchyard close by. There was only Doctor and Missus, me and the baby to follow her. Master had to be away that day, and I couldn't leave the little one alone, so I just bundled her up warm, and carried her.

The tale had got about, of course, and some of the village folk turned out to see us go by, but there was no strangers at the grave.

It was one of those still November days, sunny and mild, more like spring seemingly. Red leaves as yet on the trees, and flowers were blooming on the graves. Parson met us, and we stood round while the coffin was lowered, and the solemn words read, my pretty fast asleep in my arms.

The pale sunlight fell across us, and a robin, perched

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on a tombstone near, trilled out a sudden silver song, like a hymn for her, I thought.

Well—the days passed, and there was things had to be done. Missus and me went through all her trunks. Fine clothes she had in plenty, and jewels and furs.

“We’ll seal up the boxes, Janet, and put ‘em away in the attic for such time as the little ‘un needs ‘em,” said Missus; and sealed they was, and there they be in the attic to this day. But never a sign to tell who she was, in her clothing, or any scraps of writing left, excepting one big packet addressed “To the Doctor who attends me.”

We gave this to Doctor when he called round to see the baby, and he opened it before us.

There was a letter—he showed it to us—beginning “Kind Sir.” It went on to say she left a sum of money to pay all expenses connected with her illness and death, and to bring the little one up in comfort. She hoped the Innkeepers would let the baby live with them, and that Janet would look after it. She wished everyone to be suitably rewarded, and the child taught to be honest and true.

There was a considerable amount in bank notes—it’s best not to say how much—but no cheques or bank book by which to trace her, and never a word of the gentleman, or her sad plight.

“I don’t want any money,” said Missus, wiping her eyes. “Put it by for the bairn, Doctor; she shall bide with us and welcome. What’s a child’s keep anyway, Lord love her !”

“And I’ll be right glad to see after her, if Missus don’t mind me giving up the time,” I cried. “It’ll be a rare pleasure to have a child at the Dun Cow.” Old Doctor, he looked kindly at us.

“That poor young thing has left her baby in good hands,” said he. “God bless you both.”

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Then in time my pretty one was christened. We called her Angel, and I fought against having Smith tacked on to it. Parson gave in at last, and we named her Thorpe, after the place—that was quite pleasing to my mind.

She was a lovely child, with her mother's eyes and hair, and as she grew older her mother's proud looks, though she's a happy, sunny little mortal nevertheless.

Missus thinks the world of her, so does Master. She's the light of the Inn, and that's the truth. And to see that little maid trotting up and down the old passages, and playing hide-and-seek in the coffee-room, all unknowing of her mother, gives me a catch at my throat may a time.

She rules us all, and if anything vexes her, she'll throw up her head, and look haughty at us, just like that poor young creature did, though she's a loving little heart right enough.

'Tis now five years since she was born, and the Dun Cow and its folks don't grow younger.

I can see Mrs. Beamish had sense to her words, for when Master and Missus has gone, the Inn will change hands, and it's not reasonable that newcomers will be burdened with a strange child. Likely as not, I'll get notice to quit. So it seems the time has come to speak.

And if anyone knows aught of the matter as is set down here, and will come to the Dun Cow and make inquiries, they will find all as I've said. And if witness is needed they can go to the churchyard, where there's a grave nicely tended with a marble headstone—I had my way about the stone, spite of everyone—and on it is printed plain for all to see:

Here lies a very brave lady.

“The mills of God grind slowly,
Yet they grind exceedingly small.”

WALTER DE LA MARE

Parleyings

HILBERT had cooled down at last; and so peacefully that he almost repented of his vow—never, never to run for a train again, and particularly for a train not his own. After the din and fever of the arterial road, the tiny station, Bovey Fausset, of which he was the sole occupant—with its Noah's Ark trees, nursery bridge and toy signal—was like an oasis out of some William Morris romance. How very odd that those dreadful Victorians, slaves of the squat god, Pocket, should have indulged in anything so charming! If now and then, between trains, he could sit on here, on this hard narrow bench, in this westering September sunshine—mellow as a vintage hock—how simple it would become to rhyme *grove* with *love* and *dove*, and *anguish* with *languish*. This morning, unfortunately, he had come out without his fountain pen!

So narrow was the single track of glinting steel that he could have jumped it with ease, from platform to platform. If he had been *sure* he was alone he would have made the attempt. All along the margin of the line—this side and the other—yellow sunflowers of all tints and magnitudes, from Van Gogh tea-trays down to daisy-size, stood opulently

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courting the bees and wasps and butterflies in the gentle breeze—a breeze so gentle that it had taken at least twenty minutes to cool his fevered cheek.

Perhaps if he had not hurried until his heart itself thumped like a steam engine, he would have smelt how earthly-sweet this faint wind was, as well as cooling. It hardly seemed possible that the leather hand-bag beside him, with little else in it but books, could have come to weigh so heavy. His own books, too!

They irradiated the air—the sunflowers, and continued to be the bliss of Hilbert's outward eye until suddenly he remembered that this meant autumn. Autumn! Bedizened creatures, how odd that they should wait so long to bloom. But then, poor Hilbert didn't seem likely ever to bloom at all. Never: and this in spite of the fact that his present little expedition, which for the moment had come to so hapless yet serene a pause, just hinted that in another sphere he might have proved himself to be a real go-getter.

It was solely his own idea, too. Hilbert in fact had leanings towards literature. He was already the author of a quite recently published little volume of fancies, *pensées*, conceits. And so precisely mid-way were its contents between prose and verse that the harsher critics of an earlier era might have hinted that they had issued from a vacuum with the merits of neither. Hilbert's few reviewers had been far more indulgent. One of them, after a jocular reference (in July) to "spring poets," had spoken of "these, as doubtless we may assume, dainty first-fruits"; and another, after referring (possibly with the help of the printer) to the title of the book, *Parleyings with Pegasus*, as "these pensive parlourings," had remarked that Mr. Hilbert Winslow "wielded a dainty quill." Perhaps it was merely because

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of the rhyme of *Hil* with *quill*—but for the first time Hilbert had felt a little uneasy at his unusual Christian name. Was *that* a prose-poem? The rest of the statement of course had been merely metaphorical, since the actual pen Hilbert had left at home on his dressing-table was an exceedingly bloated “Swan.”

Still, not even *these* little encouragements had managed to effect a sale. The complete edition of fifty copies of his book that remained, after twenty-five had been squandered on the press and on a few relatives, friends and well-wishers, who on this occasion Hilbert was afraid he couldn’t depend on to be go-getters, were still in his keeping. Indeed, four of them were with him now—in his little brown bag, sharing with him the autumnal sunshine of his painted bench. Hilbert had taken this little rebuff not only with philosophy but after the manner of the young Benjamin Disraeli, facing a hostile House : “Some day you *shall* read me !” Meanwhile, as he lay in bed one morning, the bright idea had occurred to him to visit the three booksellers in the nearest town and attempt to persuade them to stock just one copy of his little book ; say, at half-a-crown, i.e., with a discount of about 29 per cent. on the published price.

When it came to a question of *acquiring* stock in this manner, however, the booksellers appeared to be singularly busy men. Hilbert had that day interviewed two. They were too busy even to find time to glance at his title-page. And even to get any attention at all from Mr. A.—a man with extremely powerful spectacles on a broken nose—Hilbert had been compelled to purchase a second-hand copy in purple, of *Poems of Passion*, by Ella Wheeler Wilcox. And this, even though in business transactions passion is the last thing desirable !

With Mr. B., on the other hand—a rather fussy man

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with a neat black moustache—the purchase of a shilling shocker had sufficed, Hilbert having no stomach left for another rival. Yet in spite of the profit thus derived, neither Mr. A. nor Mr. B. had consented to accept his commission. “If you will leave a copy with me, sir, I will look it over and let you know” had been the reply of either, in almost identical terms. And Hilbert had resisted the temptation to put on a false beard, return into the shop and persuade this busy B. to sell his particular copy before he had had time to be as good as his word.

Outside B.’s rather fusty little shop Hilbert’s four-year-old Austin Seven, as if in umbrage at her master’s failure, had decided to take a rest, and Boley Fausset had proved to be his quickest way home. Now every ounce of Hilbert’s better nature revolted against carrying back his four un-wanteds. On the other hand *Parleyings* was his first-born, and paternal affection alone shunned the notion of leaving his offspring under the seat.

What on earth was the alternative? Tracts were completely out of fashion. The only modern literature given away by hand was the circular, and circulars must work out, he supposed, at about a penny a hundred. Whereas every single 3s. 6d. copy of his *Parleyings* had cost him 10s. 11.375d. None the less, the frigid Messrs. A. and B. had but fanned the flame of his enthusiasm. If he had as yet failed to bridle his Pegasus, there was plenty of sugar where the parleyings had come from; and some day—Some Day—he would find himself safe in the saddle and Mt. Helicon in full flight to.

Nothing could exceed his assurance of this. Why, there was scarcely an object around him at this moment that was not pleading for its real right epithet: *The flaunting sunflower at the platform’s brink; The spidery arch that spans the wayside track; Alone I sate while Autumn’s furtive rust.*

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Whithersoever he turned his eye the Muse coyly responded—and Hilbert had all but decided that his next volume should be in verse—elegiacs. He had no vocation to be “modern”—yet.

In spite of mercenary booksellers and tepid relatives, was it really true that this England of Hilbert's had lost its greed for poetry? It certainly seemed so. He himself had lived laborious days. Had he not frequently forgotten his morning's glass of milk—“I'm sure, Hilbert dear, it's very unwise to compose even poetry on an empty stomach”—when busily engaged in polishing his *pensées*? Why then had he failed? And here—not twelve inches away—was Mrs. Wilcox in limp leather pleading to answer his questions! Passionately pleading. Yet he refused to consult her. Anyhow, his own answer was No, a thousand times No. This England had not forsaken herself, and not even calling her Briton would make her. Indeed, he was convinced that every boy and every gal that's born into this world *alive* will, in due season and if given the opportunity, take to rhymes—and maybe even to *vers libre*—as naturally as a duck to water—or rather, kittens to cream. He had himself. And what else did Goosey Gander and Little Jack Horner prove? It must be the grown-ups that are the offenders. Like William pears, humanity goes sleepy with age, and perhaps it is education that is to blame. All ruts. Possibly if nobody had been educated, the demand for poetry, and incidentally for his *Parleyings*, might have . . .

Here Hilbert paused. But he was not going to betray truth by any appeal to his own vanity. He would stick to his point. As scores of lady authors, many of them titled lady authors, had proclaimed in the press, every man who falls in love, or feels homesick, or smiles at an infant, or

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bows to the new moon—and most human crustaceans even have done one or the other—has actually *been* a poet, even if he were quite unaware of it at the moment, and might resent it if challenged. Had he not seen his own family butcher—his right hand nonchalantly clasping a three-cornered knife, its point embedded in his block—gazing pensively on and on out of his shop at the sunset, just as if the sanguine clouds dappling the blue were as much of his own make as was the necklace of sausages behind him on its hook?

No : Hilbert had faith in his fellow-creatures ; and here and now he was going to prove it justified. Why, of course, one can't "make" poets, since all human beings are thus already ready-made ! This inspiration actually and instantly brought him to his feet, bag in hand, though the signal was still steadily against him. He took a pace or two and sat down again, but only because he fancied the porter who had peered out of a little den at the other end of the other platform had heard his footsteps. His blue eyes glistened, his cheek paled a little. So swiftly the imagination flies that Hilbert had already betted himself an even five shillings that he would prove his thesis four times over before he got home that evening.

What is more, he vowed that if he failed, say, twice—no, say, thrice out of the four, he would give up all hope of Pegasus altogether. He would buy a sixpenny padlock and lock the stable up. He would let grass grow between its cobbles and house leeks on its tiles. He would come at times to sit and snuff the equine atmosphere, to watch the sparrows, and to overhear an occasional thud of hoof on brick or rattle of manger rope. For since Pegasi are immortal, not even the S.P.C.A. could enquire why you had immured one particular specimen out of the light of

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the morning and had not even supplied it with a bottle of old hay.

It was the simplest thing in the world, this project of Hilbert's. It was merely, for one brief afternoon, to play Paul Pry to the world at large. Englishmen (he wasn't quite so certain about Englishwomen) are so unaccustomed to talking to strangers that when they *do*, they are far more inclined to ease their hearts of all their ills, to say really what they not only mean but feel, to confide, to confess, to tell secrets. And once the heart itself begins talking—you simply cannot help it—*poetry* follows. Your speech takes to itself cadences, rhythms, tunes recognizably *lyrical*. That is why money-lenders and all officials are so prosaic—they live in their heads and abandon their feelings. Who ever heard of a tax-inspector or a gas collector rhyming? Why did Cabinet Ministers so seldom make speeches in blank verse? —simply because their hearts were not in their work. “Emotion remembered in tranquillity”—at the very first opportunity Hilbert would get the beggars to *talk*—of their pasts, preferably of their childhood. Then he would wait. And the first syllable which even a neutral would agree hinted that the speaker had even the slightest claim to be representative of the tiny island that had been responsible for the greatest, finest, oddest, crankiest, imaginativest, essentiallest poetry in the history of the world—the very moment these lips, bucolic or otherwise, audibly proved themselves to have been touched with (even a fading cinder of) the divine fire, well, that alone would be a definite proof of Hilbert's thesis. For immediate reward out would come one of the four copies of his *Parleyings* now reposing in his bag, and the first quarter, the first twenty-five *per cent.* (as Messrs. A. and B. preferred it) of his good deed for the day would have been done. It is true, of course, that poetry *needs* no reward. But *does*

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even the poet himself need a Neaera if he already has his Amaryllis ?

He might, of course, encounter only Scotchmen. And they, though the sponsors of Burns and other bards, are so thrifty by nature that they appear in general to keep to statements like "Ech," or "Ye dinna" or "Och, mon." Whereas Irishmen delight in blarney, *and* have a poetry all their own. As for the Welsh, well Hilbert had never really penetrated, so to speak, beneath the beards of the Druids. He would, then, have to be cautious.

But what a lark it would be ! From first to last in his experiences of private publishing he had never dreamed of such a reward. What's more, there was charity in it. He was going to give—even to give himself—away !

Yet again the distant porter had peered out of his cubby-hole in his direction. No doubt he was looking for the 4.10 ; and rightly so, since at this moment it was 4.44 ; and perhaps he wanted his tea. So did Hilbert. But he had been so intent on other cravings that he had not noticed it. This time, however, the porter had not gone in ; he was sallying out. Why, thought Hilbert, watching him, is a green-glassed lantern so magical an object in full daylight ? Was it because that, like poetry itself, it is of no immediate use ? And why, at an out-of-the-way little station like this, where heavy luggage must be scarce, had the porter bow legs ?

He was crossing the line, lantern in hand, as slowly and surely as even Destiny paces on. And Hilbert, as childishly as ever, loved crossing the line. He envied him. And yes—he was coming this way. How awful. Hilbert would be bound by sheer isolation to speak to him, and that might entail a complete conversation. He had suddenly realised that he detested talking to strangers. Or rather, he detested the thought of talking to strangers ; particularly strangers

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of really useful occupations—ploughmen, hedgers and ditchers, grooms, plumbers. They always made him feel so absurdly ignorant. Well, one thing, the porter's countenance resembled a sexton's lantern, he was well over middle-age, and looked taciturn.

"What a *lovely* morning!" exclaimed Hilbert. The porter slowly and cautiously surveyed his surroundings, high and low.

"It is that, sir," he said. "We usually get this kind of weather here."

"Really!" said Hilbert. "Really! Perhaps one doesn't notice it enough. Of course, as it's so very quiet—I mean when there are no trains about . . ."

"Ay," said the porter, his black eyes fixed on the almost maidenly smile of the young man, "that's part of it."

"Yes," said Hilbert.

"Quiet!" repeated the porter. "There was a gennelman here not long ago who said that looking under that bridge was like a picture frame. And if you make allowances, sir, so it is. Sometimes it's just the same; and sometimes it's quite different."

Hilbert stooped a little to peer through under the bridge—green-bright meadows, changing woods, the distant hill. But so dark, so vacantly pitched were the eyes of the porter as he surveyed it himself that Hilbert refrained even from nodding his head.

"Quiet!" repeated the porter. "Look at them sparrows there. You can sometimes hear the tic-tac of their claws on the metals as they hop it over."

Hilbert listened. "No," he said, "I can't."

The porter smiled, a slow, tranquil smile, like the shifting chequer of leaves on a tomb in a churchyard. "You have only just come, sir," he said. And perhaps it's *time* does it.

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But what, now, they pick *up* among them flints," he continued, "considering I've never seen nobody *feeding* themselves hereabouts, needs an eye I've never got. And I've watched 'em on their match-legs till I've felt my nose sharpening. Still I expex they know best. But when it comes to they pied wagtails after the *flies*! Tic-tac? Not they. Lor' bless you, they are so nimble and easy in the air you'd think they'd gone to school to their own shadows."

The porter stood less than a space from the edge of the platform. He turned and spat very carefully on to the track, then eyed his companion again. "She won't keep you much longer, sir," he reassured him. "You can catch her hummering on the metals like them evening bumbledores when she's a good three miles still to come."

He turned away, and his bow legs carried him off. Hilbert had been listening, but only half heeding, he was so intent on the cavernous face. But in an instant his quick mind reverted to the frame, and the tic-tac, and the iron rumour of the "she" he was awaiting. How very odd. Why, one of his favourite chapters in his *Parleyings* had been about birds—and very prettily written too. He had remembered William Davies's unforgettable robin—"half-way up his legs in snow"—and Lesbia's sparrow, but had clean forgotten the wagtail and had never noticed her shadow; no, nor the tic-tac. And if such little things as these were not at least on the way to poetry he was a Double Dutchman and deserved to write in his native tongue. To think that heaven should have consented to reward him so swiftly! The spring locks of his little bag flicked back with a clap, his hand dived in, he clasped a copy of his Pegasus, green as Flora's mantle, and hastened after the porter.

"Would you," he said, a little breathlessly, calling after him, "accept this?"

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The porter turned, opened his mouth, and looked at the book—as if he were Robinson Crusoe and a powder-puff had been washed up on to the beach. Then he dusted his right hand on his green corduroy trouser-leg, and held it out.

“Why, sir,” he said, “that’s an uncommon kind thought, and very welcome too, I’m sure. My daughter, now; she’s not too strong in her intellects, poor dear. She’ll take a deal of pleasure in it, even though she keeps only to the covers. If there’s one thing that keeps her smiling, sir, it’s pretty colours. Green in particular. And eyes like hers, watching out quiet in the porch most fine mornings, don’t seem to cotton much to many words.”

“No,” said Hilbert, “they don’t.” It was an awkward pause, but the porter did not seem to be indulging either in sentiment or irony. Hilbert nodded, smiled, and returned to shut his little bag. One from four leaves three, he announced to himself. It reminded him of the young man with the cream tarts, though he rejoiced that the vow he had made did not entail his having to *eat* his little books.

A peculiar faint drumming, as of a prodigious harp-string, began furtively to resound. “She” was probably not more than a mile away. If Hilbert took a few lessons from the porter at Bovey Fausset he might at last succeed in detecting her at double the distance. “Man’s senses,” suddenly exclaimed a rather dry voice from deep within his consciousness, “Man’s senses are short cuts to his sensibilities.” Hilbert determined to make a note of it. Meanwhile he was mounting up into his compartment.

When he had settled himself into his corner, and had waited long enough—his eye on the revolving scenery outside the window—to make the survey a little more polite, he ventured a glance at his only companion. He looked about seventy, frail but fibrous, and consisted of a series of narrow cylinders

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that were all but oblongs ; a high narrow head, a long narrow body, and two right-angled legs in black trousers. His waistcoat was faintly speckled, and his little white cambric bow was like that of an old-fashioned waiter. He was reading a dumpy leather-bound book, and appeared to be as far away from his rather noisy surroundings as a sleeping infant would be during a performance of *Tannhauser*.

Did Jesuit priests ever wear speckled waistcoats ? Hilbert didn't know—indeed he knew very little about the Society, though he had often wished to meet one of its members. How motionlessly the old gentleman's eyelids hung over his shuttling eyes. The blue-veined hand clasping the book never stirred. "Pious—no question," Hilbert was whispering to himself, "but a thoroughly good soul, I should guess. Severe, though. He looks," he added, a moment afterwards, "as dry as an old biscuit." It would be exceedingly bad manners—but dared he venture ?

Nothing venture, nothing win. And though the porter had been a godsend, Hilbert couldn't expect an average of one disposed-of volume every quarter of an hour, even though about sixty minutes would probably see him home again.

He leaned forward as winningly as a really good-natured barmaid. "I am so very sorry, sir, to interrupt you, but could you tell me if this is the up train ? "

The old gentleman's angel first gently composed her wings ; he himself then lifted his eyelids, lowered his book, and glanced at the young man, out of small, bright, blue-grey eyes, as keen as a kestrel's. He watched him a moment, and a tiny wrinkle showed at the corner of one of them.

"Up," he repeated. "Let me see. That's going north, isn't it ? Yes, and the sun is descending on your side. Observe the shadows. I haven't any doubt in the world

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we are both of us on our way *up*! and that, I sometimes endeavour to remind myself, is the way I hoped to be going. Alas, I can be perilously absent-minded." He had smiled outright now, as if in private confabulation with his little jest. Still, there had been that in his "up" and in the wintry twinkle that accompanied it, that set Hilbert speculating. It was a kind of Sesame. He peered into the cavern thus revealed, and though he could see but a little way, evidently it was neatly kept. There was a vista. But had the old gentleman passed his test?

Now, poetry, he was thinking to himself, at least in part depends on condensing, without, possibly, any clear excuse for it, a wide metaphorical view into a tiny morsel of mere fact. "And we are for the dark," for example. That being so, the *up*, surely, was *just* on the mark. This decision, however, left the question whether its author—who was in every line and accent and feature as unquestionably a firm believer in prose as the "Great Bear" himself, could possibly care to accept what poor Hilbert was tempted there and then to label, say, a hybrid medium—his *Parleyings*? For both their sakes Hilbert wished to be considerate. But his fingers had already strayed toward the lock of his little bag.

"Thank you very much," he said. "Very much indeed. It is always a—relief to know, to be sure one is not in the wrong train—when travelling, I mean. But I am not a traveller in the other sense—not *commercially*. It's only that—well, that a friend of mine has suggested . . ." his eye fell under the old gentleman's steady scrutiny. "I was wondering, sir, if you would do me the kindness of accepting —*this*?"

He snapped open his bag and withdrew the first copy that presented itself. "It's—it's only *prose*, I'm afraid."

"You are very kind," said the old gentleman, bestowing

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on Hilbert a formal, but courteous nod of the head, as he took the book between his lean old fingers. "Thank you. I am not a great reader, indeed have little leisure, but when the opportunity comes I shall be most happy to read the book."

At which, heedless of the blush which he was aware had suffused his cheek, Hilbert managed to retrieve his fib. "As a matter of fact," he blurted, "it was *not* exactly a friend. *I—I mean—I am the author.*"

"Indeed," said the old gentleman. "That makes the gift doubly welcome. Until this moment we had never met, and now, in what remains of this life"—he tapped the book with his finger—"we shall never be parted."

For some little time, as his new acquaintance had at once resumed his reading, Hilbert sat watching the passing countryside—sheaves heavy with harvest in some of the fields, stubble in others; whirring flights of autumn birds. Another year was emptying itself away. We plough the fields—and scatter. He ought, he supposed, to have told the old gentleman *all* the facts of the case. But while he was pondering how difficult that might prove, his head nodded, chin on chest, and he fell asleep.

He awoke so sluggishly that he was aware of a voice declaiming and on before he decided to open his eyes.

"What *I* say is, treat 'em rough and ready and they'll lick your boots. Pamper them, and they won't give you so much as a Thank-you. But no; Aggie never was the one to take advice. In at one ear and out at the other; though, if she hasn't had her lesson now, her whole life in ashes as you might say, I'm not the one to rub the salt in. Straight up from the country, fare and all that girl had come—some-where down Swindon way, so she *said*—and before she'd been in the house a week, in came m'lady from the pictures

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at getting on for one in the morning with her No. 2 in young men as large as life, and I give you *my* word dressed up to the knocker and as bold as brass in Aggie's blue hat and her best glacé kids. There, on her feet, mind you ! ”

“ Go on ! ” murmured a second unseen speaker.

“ I should just about say she did go on ! And her husband sitting there with his pipe between his teeth as if butter wouldn't melt in his mouth. Swinging his leg and yawning his head off. Not that I wouldn't allow it was chiefly Aggie's *fault* ; as you make your bed so you must lay on it. Spoiled, that was what *that* girl was, like the one that had gone before her. Gas stove fresh from the works, Bristle's sweeper, pink-edged crockery and a spring mattress all complete—I never heard the likes of it. What the world's coming to I *don't* know. What's more, he defended her, put in *his* spoke. ‘ Up from the country,’ and all that. Country !—ask *me* ; a chit with rouge and lipstick all over her face, and that pasty-skinned you could see her without a candle in the dark ! ”

“ Go on ! ”

“ Yes, and so they did, all three of 'em, hammer and tongs, though what she thought of *bim* she kept for upstairs and the door shut—not for that baggage to be listening in to. A bit of her mind Aggie gave him, though I will say she hasn't too much to spare. And when they come down next morning, lo and behold all what remained of a meat breakfast on the kitchen table—meat, mind you—and the girl herself gone, lock, stock and barrel, and Aggie's best set of real silk undies gone with her.”

“ Silk ! lor, I never.”

“ Nor didn't Aggie. Fare paid and faked up references, until I expect she's got to Buckingham Palace by now—or Holloway. And that angelic looking in spite of her sauce,

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you might have been staring straight into the Garden of Eden every time she opened her mouth."

"Go on!"

"Yes, and ask *me*, that's what kept *him* quiet. Give a man a face to look at, and the devil himself might just as well throw in his checks for all what he thinks is nothing but envy and slander. That ended it. He couldn't stand it any longer, and she went back to her mother, Aggie did, and to that poky upstairs dressmaking business all over again. But it's little Amy *my* heart bleeds for. Pore mite, with her saucer eyes shivering there on the brink! Better her daddie safe in his grave, if I had my choice! It's my belief we're here because we are put; and you might as well be a cabbage as think you have got any say about it. I never did hold with it, and never shall."

But this time the second unseen refrained from expressing anything.

Hilbert, having rapidly attempted to digest this secondhand miscellaneous slice of experience, opened his eyes, and peered out in the direction of the voice at what was now in the further corner of the carriage, whence, alas, his old Jesuit, while he himself was dreaming, had departed. Thus motionless, he explored yet another stranger.

She was a woman dressed up in what Hilbert supposed to be cretonne, of a remarkable design, and she wore pink stockings. She had a long face and high knee bones, an eye like a suffering and contemptuous hen, a mouth that told an inexhaustible tale of inward woe. Beside her stood a tall gaping basket, woven of gaudy bast, in a pattern that would intoxicate a Hottentot. Its maw gaped as omnivorously as a shark's.

Now Hilbert, above all things, wished to be fair—to himself, to his apple-green first-fruits, to humanity in general,

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and above all to the Muses. Possibly because the talk he had just heard had been poured into his ear while he sat between sleeping and waking, he could recall a good deal of it. And if style is the man himself, certainly *its* was a large part of this lady. Like a bee in a garden, he hardly knew where to alight first. On Aggie's blue hat or the devil's checks? Or the blonde of whom the merest fleeting glimpse disclosed that she had very few clothes on?

Hilbert was frail enough, too, to be bowled over even by the most casual intimation of the Garden of Eden, and he narrowed his inward eye a little at sight of the "pore mite's" "brink." He felt uneasy. His chapter on *Images* had suddenly in memory, fallen a little flat. His old Jesuit had packed a life-time into a word of two letters. Aggie's friend preferred abandon, and was far nearer the cauliflower in effect than the cabbage. But *was* there any connection between cauliflowers and poetry? What would Miss Wilcox have said? From Miss Wilcox, Hilbert, on nimble wing, sped off to Matthew Arnold; and was reassured.

Assuredly if poetry *is* "a criticism of life," then the late speaker, who, having long since spied out that the grey-flannel-suited young man in the opposite corner was now awake, and who was now engaged in unruffling her plumage, had quite unintentionally bestowed on him a dose of it that could only be described as "hot and strong." *Possibly*, even, and *sub specie æternitatis* too! The universality of her remarks! The hugger-mugger stage, the domestic drama, the ferocity! "Go on!" indeed. He would willingly have paid the full price of a modern stall in the front row if only she would consent to go on in the same fashion until the end of his journey. And surely, wouldn't sweet William, Swan of Avon, have simply revelled in her fumes? "Stay put!" She! Never. But heavens alive, the train was slowing up.

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She had turned her henlike head straight at him, and had clutched at the handles of her basket, as if in sheer defiance of the world at large. In another moment she would be gone. But meanwhile she was beginning again :

"What I say is, truth's truth ; and I don't care what eavesdroppers perking their ears in corners unbeknown and shamming doggo may have heard me. A woman may work her fingers to the bone for a man and him not so much as a Thank-you. But Aggie—*she* go back—never ! Though she has no more of what I should call female *charm* than a tallow candle."

She had risen ; the train had stopped. There was no time now even for a word of congratulation, let alone a convincing decision. Aggie's friend's loose-mouthed young companion had already squeezed clumsily past his knees and was alighting. The bast bag yawned like Limbo a few inches under his nose. With a half-triumphant, half-contrite glancing gaze up into the woman's face, and with lightning rapidity, Hilbert opened his little bag, extracted yet one more copy of the *Parleyings* ! his third, and slipped it in. Could enterprise go further ?

Well, there must have been a streak of the troubadour in Hilbert's make-up. It accounted, perhaps, for the fact that his purple patches were occasionally of a purple a little loud. As the wheels of his carriage more rapidly revolved, he stood up at the window, smiled charmingly at both parties, and—raised his hat.

Decisions are always reviving. Alert and alone again, he returned to his corner. And there, amid the rattle of glass and wood and steel—the long-shadowed September sunshine beyond his window, rusty gold on sheaf and stack and thatch and pensive beech wood—he burst out laughing. Never for a moment had he dreamed that the mere circulation

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of his *Parleyings* could require such critical skill. He was three up, one to play, and (he glanced at his watch) there was forty minutes to go. Why, he could probably dispose of the complete edition on a five shilling fare in two days' railway travelling. Much would depend on what happened to his "fourth." At which, as if he had positively beckoned it with his finger, the name-board of the station he had but a moment before left behind him, flashed back into his consciousness. His own was three behind it! He had overslept.

By nature impulsive, Hilbert at once seized his bag, tugged at the brim of his hat and prepared to alight; and then, seeing that the train was bumping along at little less than thirty miles an hour, he sat down again. When he did get out—a few minutes afterwards—the only human being in sight (after he had explained his sad condition to the collector) was a curate, a strapping young man, with lips like a cherry, and the assured air of a juvenile archdeacon. How odd; two of a cloth, if not of a kidney, in less than an hour! Still, if the Church went on like this all would be well. The cherry effect—he felt assured, as he stalked his latest prey up the wooden steps over the bridge—was only skin deep. The young man walked with decision, and he held his head—not exactly like Byron's gladiator, perhaps, but as if there were something which he knew was of value inside it. On the other hand, it was a head that somehow seemed unpromising—for Hilbert's purposes. Its mere shape and carriage suggested that it was further than usual from its companion piece, the heart. It might be bound for a New Jerusalem, but what little Hilbert detected of it hadn't the least resemblance to Blake's. Hilbert began to fear it might be as easy to extract plums from plain duff as what he wanted from this athletic young ecclesiastic. Still, *nil desperandum*, though he must waste not a moment.

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The curate had seated himself, and from a side-pocket had extracted a copy of a bluish-covered magazine. Hilbert passed him by, wheeled, coughed.

"I have been taken on," he said, "by mistake. I went to sleep, in fact. This *is* the train for Dunmow Downs, isn't it?"

The young man in Holy Orders looked up. "Absolutely," he said. "Quite." "I am expecting—er—a friend by the next train in, and my own station is the one before it. Bad luck."

"Not at all," said Hilbert, continuing to smile because he was listening so hard. "It's this drowsy autumn weather."

"Yes," said the young stranger, whose jacket and trousers and nattily tailored "vest" were *all* of pepper-and-salt, and who, from dog collar to black brogue shoes, was as neat as a new altar vase, "it *is* a bit close. Thunder, perhaps. I wake *myself* by knocking my head on the window frame once for each station I have to go. It's infallible. But then, when *I* go to sleep I always intend to; and I never dream."

"Gracious heavens!" groaned Hilbert inwardly. He surveyed the choice shaven face with ill-concealed consternation. He must try another tack. "One misses so much, too," he went on seductively, "even if one does. Dream, I mean. The lovely scenery, for example, between here and Bovey Fausset; especially when it is getting towards evening, and the sun is low." The very words were an anodyne.

At this the young man eyed Hilbert steadily, and eyed him whole. Then he slowly refolded his magazine, replaced it in his pocket, and said, "Yes. I suppose nice scenery *is* a pleasant adjunct to railway travelling—but I haven't much time for it myself."

"No," breathed Hilbert, and nodded. "Yes," he added, "a great adjunct. And now the swallows will soon be flown."

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" Odd beggars, aren't they ? " remarked the curate. " All that journey just to come back ! I read in a scientific periodical the other day . . . "

The ensuing soliloquy which ranged from " natural history " to—in Hilbert's modest opinion—completely unnatural socialism lasted for seventeen minutes. But the moment his companion had warmed up, encouragement was superfluous. It was soon as much as Hilbert could do to refrain from listening. If the sea were sand, then this young man—at least on his favourite topics—talked like a spring tide. But it is not from sand of this nature that Poesy's buds of Sharon raise their gentle heads. Hilbert had had too much luck at the word Go!—and now his wind was failing him. His little bag was lighter, though not yet light enough ; but how much heavier was his heart !

Nine minutes before his allotted time was up a train rolled into the station, and its last but one carriage contained the " er—friend " whom—it seemed centuries ago—the curate had referred to. And then—everything, if not perhaps forgiven, was utterly forgotten. She was standing at the open window, looking out, and yet as if she were still looking *in*—an oval face with high cheekbones, and eyes and mouth from which a remote smile was now vanishing as softly and secretly, thought Hilbert, as a bird enters and vanishes into its nest. In a flash of acute foreboding he scanned the eight ungloved fingers that clasped the window sash—that almost meaningless " er—friend " had suddenly sounded like a knell. But no ; every one of the eight was ringless—every single one. Hilbert turned away, as if momentarily exhausted.

" Ah, there you are ! " the curate had breezily announced, " and three and a half minutes late ! . . . What I was saying

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about Karl Marx. . . ." the shouting of his voice came booming over his shoulder at Hilbert—and Hilbert, as meekly as a dove, followed him in. Seated opposite brother and sister, and in a panic of spirit that was past all mundane concerns, he forgot time, his bet, Messrs. A. and B., his Jesuit, Aggie, and even his little bag and the Muses. His only wish in the world was that the peculiarly disguised young Good Samaritan in the opposite corner should continue his discourse, his dessication and disposal of Syndicalism, the National Recovery Act, dictatorships, Naziism and every other ism *ad infinitum*. When he stopped, the train would have stopped and—well, she would be gone. Meanwhile, to that lusty Oxford voice, an occasional faint "Yes," and a still fainter "No," was no more of an obstruction than a pebble is to a cataract.

What she was thinking of, or rather, not *thinking* of, Hilbert hadn't the faintest notion. And yet, such is the inflammability of the imagination that but one single glance into this fair and serious face had sufficed him for the stirrings of a latter-day *Paradiso* (in English *terza rima*) to which even the long and hairy ear of Fleet Street would be compelled to incline. But now, alas, as he had forlornly foreseen, since the train had stopped, the voice had stopped, and so had his own semi-conscious "cerebration."

"Well, and what do *you* say?" the young curate had bawled his first mocking remark at his Griselda-like sister as if it were a bone flung to a dog. And she, as if to be serious was a refuge for everything worth having in a world so noisy and exclamatory and absurd, turned not to her brother, but to Hilbert. She sat there, quite still for a full moment, one hand on either side of her lap, and then smiled. A volley of the gayest and hollowest ecclesiastical laughter followed.

"Oh, *she!*—she never says anything!" the young man

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assured his fellow traveller, and with a breezy “Good-day to you !” he was gone.

Left alone for the fourth time since he had run panting up into Boley Fausset station, Hilbert drew his bag a little closer. It contained at this moment, apart from his Wilcox, but one single copy of his *Parleyings*. And this now, would never, never, never leave his possession. He might perhaps get another copy exquisitely bound in tooled morocco in the remote hope that destiny would give him another chance. But that copy would have nothing whatever to do with his bet, which by a niggardly twenty-five *per cent.* had now been irretrievably lost. For, since he had to be honest with himself, if only for his old Jesuit’s sake, the *terms* and conditions of that bet had been—“*audibly proved*.” She—she had said nothing ; not a word. And of course, strictly speaking, Thomas Gray’s “*mute . . . Milton*” was a contradiction in terms. Hilbert would have explained this to her—if only she had been there to explain it to ! Meanwhile he had realised also that there is a goddess whose name is Silence, and that it is in her light and loveliness that the buds of Sharon break into bloom.

“ You see,” he was explaining to himself, as he rang the bell in the old eighteenth century porch of his mother’s house, for he had forgotten his latch-key, “ you see what is *called* poetry is merely trying to put into words what cannot, of course, *ever* be really *said*.”

A tiny barking like a jangling of Chinese temple bells greeted him from afar. He gently closed the door. “ Never,” he added, “ I am afraid.”

MARIAN BOWER

Reticence

EDWARD BUMBLY, nicknamed “Mum,” on account of his habit of making spare with his speech, owned the last cottage on Tudisham Tye.

Each of these cottages was freehold ; each carried with it the right to graze one cow or two geese on the diminutive common before it, and this amenity, coupled with the fact that the Tye did not neighbour with the Street, caused envy—and sometimes malice—in the hearts of those who dwelt in the village itself.

The freeholds (they were always referred to thus), each white-washed, each thatched, with a square of garden in front and a shed behind, were dotted round three sides of the green. On the fourth was the “river,” a stream which flowed stingily at the best of times, and in a hot summer was reduced to a chain of puddles. But whether running or stagnant, the river served to fill the domestic kettle, or as a receptacle for refuse.

No sooner, however, was a new Reverent preached into Tudisham, after most of fifty years peace with the old Vicar, than the misguided man must needs mell hisself up with the water supply to the Tye.

Thereupon the freeholders organised a deputation and

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marched up the half-mile of mud lane to where the church and the Vicarage shared a splendid isolation in the midst of a ploughed field, to impress on the Reverent that their health was their own concern, and so was their water supply.

Mum, to the amazement of all Tudisham—for he kept hisself to hisself to such a degree that he always pulled down his window blind before he lighted the lamp, for fear that passers-by might see into his cottage—headed the deputation, and so became aware that the new Vicar possessed, not one bicycle, but two.

Mum passed for a joiner. In reality he was a survivor of those mediæval craftsmen who have left wonderful evidences of their skill in many an East Anglian church, and loved their work for its own sake. Mum was never known to take an ordinary job, no matter what might be the pay, and did not care how far he went afield to one which pleased him.

But the previous winter, Mum had hurt his leg, and long tramps, from being of no account whatever, became a painful consideration. He pondered the advisability of buying a bicycle, but shrank from the publicity of a deal with Tim Masterby up the Street, who made a dubious living in the cycle trade.

The Vicar's second best machine presented a way out of the difficulty. Of course, Reverents were by nature incalculable. But could anyone want two push-bikes! Therefore the old one must be for sale—secondhand.

Mum saw his opportunity. But it would never do to go up to the Vicarage and just butt in with an offer to buy.

The Reverent was taken with a “crazy” notion to fix shelves—deal ones—round his study walls. Mum put in for the job, and was preferred before red-headed Street Joe, who had made sure that anything so rough must fall to his share.

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After hesitating until the last hour of the last day before he packed up his tools, Mum made an offer, and the bicycle became his, on the understanding that he might leave the machine in the Vicarage tool-house until it was convenient to fetch it.

The Tye and the Street both had their opinion about Mum's flagrant departure from custom. The Tye felt aggrieved that Mum should let himself down to do odd-man's work ; the Street inquired why-for Mum Bumbly wanted to take the bread out of Red-headed Joe's mouth !

The patriarch of Tudisham, old Krewe, who just might be ninety odd, or just mightn't, was sure that there must be somethen' unbeknownst about Mum's wholly queer goen's on. This opinion, repeated sufficiently often, promoted old Krewe from the bench outside the inn, where he had to cadge for a sup out of a neighbour's mug, to the tap room, where he was provided with a pint all to himself at the company's expense.

Red-headed Joe declared that Mum was growing as mean as he was near, and Tim Masterby charitably hoped that Mum's dirty ways might "wholly mucky hisself."

A master big poaching affray diverted attention for the next two evenings from Mum.

Tudisham was not by any means above going after a hare or snickling a rabbit on its own account. That was sport, and if profitable sport, so much the better. But an organised raid by townways folk was an intrusion.

Old Krewe was vehement about the owdacious cheek of furriners who were no better than thieves, and was sartin sure someone near abouts must have told the gang when to come and where to come. Then someone else recollect ed to have seen Mum Bumbly slinking up the lane on the night of the raid.

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For a moment, the assembly paused before the impossibility that one so "well put on" (i.e., respectable) as Mum, could be mixed up with such low deeds. But old Krewe suggested that seein' was believin', and called for volunteers.

Two youths were ready enough to be entrusted with anything which savoured of adventure. They were instructed to hide behind the hedge facing Mum's back'us door, and to keep a watch on his going and returning.

The first night the lads resisted any temptation to stir from behind the hedge. The next, a cold wind tempered their zeal, and the vicinity of a hare undermined their integrity. The consequence was, that when Mum came home, past ten at night, they were too far off to see more than that he pushed something like a gret sack, chock full, into his shed, then, locked the door and put the key into his pocket.

"Put the key in his pocket!" repeated old Krewe. "For why?"

That question was debated up the village, down the village. It was amplified, elaborated, until there came a morning when Tudisham was aroused to breathless excitement by the news that the Inspector himself, as well as the local constable, was on his way to the Tye.

Conjecture decided that the cops were after Mum Bumbly, and that the visit had something to do with the poaching affray. Rumour was convinced that the constable was provided with a hammer with which to break open the shed door if Mum would not produce the key.

First a cheeky lad set off for the Tye to see the fun; a curious woman followed; after them hurried men, women and children.

The crowd pulled up on the grass across the road fro

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Mum's cottage. Every blind in all the other freeholds went down as a protest against the combined indignity of a police inspection and the eruption from the Street. The latter being perhaps the more resented.

Next, more than twenty pairs of curious eyes saw the representative of the law knock at Mum's front door, saw Mum himself come out, saw the three of them walk round towards the shed.

Heedless of Mum's privacy, the Street swarmed over his garden.

The Inspector opened the door of the shed ; the constable remained without, standing—close to Mum.

The inspector came forth.

He was tugging along with him something too large to be covered by one sack.

" Game nets—on a hand-cart ! " cried out a shrill voice.

Mum turned in the direction of the outburst, and something about him checked the beginning of a groan.

The Inspector unfastened a large cover of sacking. It fell.

It showed, not a poacher's paraphernalia, but the Vicar's second best bicycle !

" Was this what you brought home after dark ? " asked the Inspector.

" That was, " admitted Mum.

" Then why make such a mystery about it ? " demanded the Inspector.

" My business be my own business, " answered Mum.

" I suppose you bought the bicycle ? " pursued the officer.

" How else would I ha' got it, d'you reckon ? "

" Who sold it to you ? "

" That was the Reverent's. His second best. He'd got two on 'em."

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"Then why couldn't you bring it home at a proper time?" went on the Inspector.

"Haps I might ha' been seen."

"You were seen, as it was."

"No," differed Mum. "I warn't seen. I were foller'd fer spite."

The Inspector looked at the constable, and the constable was uneasily sure that he would receive his superior's opinion of ill-directed zeal on the way home.

There followed a pause. For once the majesty of the law was disconcerted.

It was Mum who spoke first.

"That, misters," he said, with a wave of his hand to the left, "is your nearest way onto the road."

He waited until he was alone. Turned and faced the onlookers. They melted, as snow melts before a hot sun.

Taking his time about it, Mum lifted his bicycle back into the shed, and in all the other freeholds, the blinds went up as quickly as, not fifteen minutes before, they had gone down.

Mum went back into his cottage, and as he closed the back'us door, he told himself with satisfaction that the most inconvenient happenings had certain useful aspects. It would be a considerable time before anybody troubled themselves again about his concerns.

"And what's more," he concluded, "if it hadn't been for this, I'd have had to go on me bad leg another two month or more. That 'ud've taken till November for the mornens' to be dark enough, and the nights to dror in soon enough for me to have got in and out without folks all seein' I'd got meself a bicycle."

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Panahard and Mr. Snaith

THE Clergy of St. Barnabas, Shrubbery Road, near Regent's Park, were having their weekly staff meeting on Monday morning at the Parish Hall. They would have been far more comfortable in the Vicar's study, but Canon Crowhurst said there was very grave danger of serious spiritual discussion degenerating into mere social or domestic gossip, unless the Clergy, like other business men, left home and went to their offices.

He was a self-important man, arrogant and rather snobbish ; he liked dashing out continually and saying to his wife, "I must get down to the Hall, we have vital problems to consider today, vital ; I don't know when I shall be back."

He had two curates, who were politely called "assistant priests," and who were referred to by the Canon as, "My colleagues, Mr. Pryce-Morden and Mr. Snaith." In theory this was all very well, but in practice there was a great gulf between Canon Crowhurst and Mr. Pryce-Morden on one edge, and Snaith, on the extreme opposite edge of a social ravine.

If Pryce-Morden were an assistant priest and colleague, Snaith was definitely *the Curate*. He had no University degree, no hood, and his father was a shop keeper in Skipton.

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He was a curate, nothing else ; no pretty names could hide that horrid fact. He looked like a curate, dressed like one, talked like one and presumably thought like one. Certainly he was treated like one. He would have made an admirable poster for the Private Secretary, with his high forehead and pale red receding hair. He was even seen with school-treats at Hampton Court, wearing a sack-like frock coat and black gloves. And on his narrow rounded shoulders lay all the drudgery and donkey work of the parish.

Crowhurst and Pryce-Morden were very much Oxford men, and their flaming hoods (for pass degrees in Classics and History respectively) were well received by the congregation of St. Barnabas, as clinching the social and academic difference between the senior clergy and Snaith, who walked humbly down the aisle in a bare white surplice, like any chairman. It did sometimes hurt Snaith a little that, after ten years hard work in Durham among miners, his only promotion had been to come as Junior Curate to a semi-fashionable parish, where he ranked below Pryce-Morden, who had been only three years in Orders.

However, he didn't complain, he knew his place and he knew Pryce-Morden would be beneficed long before himself. He was just Snaith the Curate, with no degree and not a gentleman, Snaith, who was scraping together twenty pounds each year out of his stipend to marry rather an ugly girl he had loved for fifteen years. Nobody knew about that in the parish. He wasn't like Pryce-Morden, who daringly took girls out to dinners and dances. Snaith's girl was in Yorkshire ; an elementary school teacher, with slight indigestion and a heart of gold.

Just at the moment Snaith was feverishly taking down notes, while Crowhurst and Morden talked to each other and at him.

PANAHARD AND MR. SNAITH

The weekly routine of services, preachments, socials and meetings had been already arranged, and Snaith's pocket book was black with entries, but now they were discussing a big concert in aid of extensive Church repairs.

"I think we might have six rows of half-guinea seats, don't you, Pryce-Morden?" the Canon was saying.

"Certainly, Vicar. If you and I write personal letters to people we know, there should be no difficulty in getting people who can run to that. Half a dozen rows, even ten rows, at that price should be possible with a little push."

"Split the difference, then, Morden, call it eight rows. Got that down, Snaith?"

"Yes, Vicar," said the Curate, patiently scratching out all previous suggestions and putting down "Eight rows at 10s. 6d."

So it went on, the interminable dreary discussion about prices, gangways, posters. Crowhurst and Pryce-Morden were to pull mysterious social and artistic wires to collect a titled audience and rather third class musical stars.

"Sir Edward is sure to come, if I ask him," the Canon would say, "and bring a big party. Decent chap, we were up at Merton together."

Then Morden would cap this. "I'll have a shot at getting Barnett to sing. He was my fag at school, doing jolly well now, they say. Singing everywhere."

Naturally, all practical arrangements were left to Snaith, who was to try and get help from the Church Army Captain. Printing of programmes, tickets and posters, that was Snaith's job. Getting off Entertainment tax, that was Snaith's job. Pushing cheap tickets in the parish, that was Snaith's job. Numbering and reserving seats in the hall, that was Snaith's job. Seeing to the lighting and

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tuning of the piano, that was Snaith's job. Refreshments for the artists, that was Snaith's job, the Curate's job.

At the tail end of the meeting, when Crowhurst was looking at his watch and thinking about lunch, Snaith ventured upon a mild suggestion. "I know a man, Vicar, who is rather a good violinist. He's a Curate at St. Edmund's, Brixton Hill. People like his playing."

"Programme pretty long already, isn't it?" said Morden.

But the Canon was magnanimous. "Quite a nice idea, Snaith. Ask your friend to come."

"Only you must take care not to put him in where he'll get in the way of well-known artists," added Morden tartly, jealous of any success on the part of an inferior being.

Snaith said nothing to that, he simply made another note.

Ten days or a fortnight later, when the concert was uncomfortably near, the Curate was out in various back streets, conscientiously pestering people to buy shilling tickets. And he was doing well, because the working class families liked him. He was so plain and unassuming, so exactly Victorianly what a Curate ought to be; he even said prayers with them and visited them when they were ill. They didn't go to Church, of course, for that was an extreme measure, but they would go to this concert to please a spectacled friend.

There was only one regrettable feature about Snaith's parochial visitations, and this was that the children, especially the lads, could never be prevented from running after him and commenting frankly about his appearance and his clothing. Sometimes, even, they threw things at him, not stones, but vegetable refuse or half-eaten apples, combined with occasional old eggs. Nobody ever threw anything at the Canon or Pryce-Morden.

Snaith took it all in good part, and it gave great pleasure to the children, who really liked him. Their bombarding

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activities were good natured rather than spiteful. Little girls would fling potatoes, and then run to be kissed ; small boys would heave sprouts and then hang on to the Curate's fingers. It was all part of a game.

So, when Snaith, in frock coat and black gloves with a small round hat perched on his red head, came in at one end of Edgar Street, he was not in the least surprised to be greeted by a perfect fusillade of missiles and affectionate banter :

"Look at 'is 'at." Pong ! A sprout landed on his ear.

"Get your 'air cut, carrots." Ping ! Some stale fish and chips glanced across his spectacles. This was mere routine. Snaith took no notice, but automatically held out his hands for dirty clinging fingers ; he was busy reckoning up tickets.

Then, from the other end of the street, came a sudden frenzied roar of shrieks and shouts, laughter and turmoil. Snaith looked up, and it was as if he were gazing into some grotesque mirror. Approaching him was a sort of exaggerated caricature of himself, a man in a long greasy frock coat with a small black hat poised upon a shock of flaming red hair ! He was surrounded by a pack of yelling children, who were taking pot shots with potatoes, tomatoes, carrots and sprouts, filched from neighbouring stalls. The Man was waving a stick frantically, gesticulating, and giving tongue in strange uncommon oaths of foreign extraction.

"*Sacré-himmel-von-der-gotz-teufel-nom d'un singe-bleu-peste—*" It flowed out in an endless stream, but the more the victim struck out wildly with his stick and shouted, so much the more did the rabble of children yell and howl with laughter, and the flying vegetation grew thicker and more furious.

Snaith was dazed with astonishment for a minute, then, flourishing his umbrella like a sword, he charged to the

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rescue of his glorified double. From outside it was magnificent, as if two red headed rival Pied Pipers, trailing clouds of children, were closing for ordeal by battle. And as the two opposing armies clashed, the two central figures, with frock-coats and flaring crowns, were veiled in a cascade of rotting artillery fire.

The children were taking sides and making huge sport of the situation.

"Who's for ginger, the Curick?" and "Who's for 'is twin brother, escaped from the Zoo?"

But just as the frantic stranger was trying to prod Snaith with his cane, in desperate bewilderment, the Curate asserted himself in a way unknown to the Canon, to Pryce-Morden, or to the Parish. Towering to his full height, he whacked several urchins over the shoulders with mighty clouts of his rolled umbrella, and in a stentorian voice he roared:

"Stop insulting a stranger, you dirty little brats. Haven't I"—whack!—"told you in Sunday School"—whack!—"to love your neighbour,"—whack! "You can throw things at me"—whack!—"because we are old friends"—whack!—"but strangers don't understand"—whack!—"and you must learn to behave"—whack! whack! whack!

The missiles ceased, there was a deathly silence. The long black worm had turned, perhaps the red hair did it. One daring lad tried to put back the clock. He chucked a sprout and said, "Go home and sleep it off, Curick." An umbrella descended upon his unprotected skull. Crack! The boy it was that died.

"Go away home, now, the lot of you," said Snaith, and in a few minutes the two egg-stained, vegetable-dyed gentlemen were left in possession of the field.

"Zo, in England," said the stranger, "Zey pelt you if zey loff you, hein?"

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He noticed nothing at all odd about Snaith's dress or appearance.

"Well, not exactly that," answered the Curate, "but the children here think I'm rather funny, and it amuses them to throw things, so I let them." He was his mild self again.

The stranger smiled and ran his piercing black eyes up and down Snaith. Except for the clerical collar their costume was almost identical, and they both had red hair, although the curate's was far shorter and paler than his twin's extravagant mane. There the likeness ended; Snaith had, well, a humble Curate's face, whilst the other had the head of a man who knew he was great. His eyes were hypnotic as magnets, his nose beaked and arrogant, his mouth voluptuous.

"Perhaps zey mistake me for you!" he said, with a great bellow of laughter. "Zat is goot, very goot. Me for you! Ze great Panahard for you! Himmelkranz!! Vot a choke."

Now at that time Panahard's name was as well known in the musical world as Kreisler's; he was the greatest romantic violinist of the century, and besides that he was fantastically eccentric in his clothing and in his habits. His personality and genius enabled him to get away with the wildest escapades and practical jokes on the public, and his name, even for one item on a programme, was sufficient to fill the largest halls in Europe or America at almost any price.

He was gloriously conceited and very violent in all his emotions, and at the moment his heart warmed towards Snaith.

Snaith, so poor and humble, so pale an imitation of himself, the great and splendid! And Snaith had rescued him from the so bloody and horrible English gamins. Snaith must be rewarded by an opulent gesture: What to do? He had

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almost expected Snaith to fall down in astonished admiration at the magic name of Panahard, but the Curate was still so dazed and so worried about helping a stranger that the significance of this word of power failed to penetrate to his brain.

"Look here, Sir," he said solemnly, "I expect you've missed your way down here, but you can't go on as you are, all covered with egg and tomato. I think, if you don't mind, you had better come to my rooms for a wash and brush up."

And so, not without some jibes and missiles in other streets, the two odd companions went to Snaith's clean respectable rooms in Garner Road. The little sitting room was particularly clean and hideous, and there were two ultra-particularly hideous photographs in it. One was a group of sullen, dogged looking young men, among whom was Snaith at his "Theo. Coll." The other was a stark, unflattering photograph of a girl with a heavy jaw and a small upturned nose ; this fascinated Panahard and he stood in front of it speechless in wonder.

"She is lovely, isn't she ?" said the Curate, with a slight gulp, and Panahard, the artist and libertine, was moved with a more generous, unselfish emotion than he had known for years.

"Your girl ? Hein !" he said, "yes loffly. Zo speeretual and so unworldly, zo goot. Young man, sit down, you eenterest me, you aff 'elp me. I 'elp you ? You are priest, English priest marry ? Now, leesen. I am Panahard . . ." This time the shot went home.

"What ! Panahard, the great violinist ? Panahard Saladin ?"

This was one of the situations Panahard treasured—recognition in some obscure street or room ; it was more concentratedly pleasant than the applause of a vast audience.

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The savour and incense of flattery were a sweet smelling sacrifice in his nostrils. He expanded in glowing visions of patronage towards a simple English priest.

" You laike my music ? You 'aff, perhaps, my regords ? "

" There's one on the gramophone now," said Snaith, " a Slavonic Dance. Magnificent."

Music was Snaith's concealed passion ; he had a cheap gramophone and a decent second-hand upright piano, which he played when his diary wasn't too black with Scouts and socials.

The two men were kindled with a great enthusiasm, Snaith for Panahard, and Panahard for Panahard. The virtuoso stood up, with a rich gesture.

" I send you new gramovone, and all my regords for ever ? Hein ! "

Then he saw a pile of printed tickets on the table, " Grand Concert in the Parish Hall on Thursday, May 5th, at 8 p.m."

" Vot ! Ein Concert ? I play for you, you save my laife, I beeld your ghurch ? Goot. I make you a crowd, money rolls in. Then you are reech, they make you episcop, how you call it, nex wik ! "

Snaith sat down with a bump, his mind working at a gallop. His curate friend, the violinist, had failed him that very morning. Put Panahard in his place ? Impossible, it couldn't be real. " You can't mean that seriously, Sir," he said. " You don't understand what sort of a concert this is at all. It's a parish affair, with one or two third rate professionals thrown in. It would injure your reputation."

" Nozing gan injure my repudation," said Panahard colossally. " I am eenterest in you and your concert. Tell me all."

And then for once Panahard became an audience, for through all Panahard's conceit Snaith felt sympathy and

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understanding. He poured out not only the history of the concert, but also the story of his struggles and scrapings and humiliations. He told about his father's music shop in Skipton ; that pleased Saladin.

“ ’E zell strings ? I order von tousand, von million ! ”

He told about his girl, about his ordination, about Crowhurst and Pryce-Morden. And, as he spoke of them, he could not keep the bitterness out of his voice.

“ They leave the working of this whole concert to me,” he said, “ except for writing a few letters, but if its a success, they get all the credit—the Bishop has his eye on them. But nobody pays attention to me, it’s—it’s rather hard, Sir. Still, after all, I am a priest and I ought not to be so proud as to care.”

“ And are zey not priests, too ? ” asked Panahard, in indignation. “ Zis shall be your concert, your furore, your triumph, viz my ’elp, of gorse.”

Suddenly he said to Snaith, pointing to the piano.

“ Play. Let me ’ear.”

The command was so sharp that Snaith had no time to be nervous. He sat down and played a Chopin study. His playing lacked fire and imagination, but it was crisp, intelligent and accurate. He played from memory. Panahard said nothing, so the Curate slipped into a Scriabin nocturne. The violinist stood up.

“ You are vore days to ze concert ? Leesen, ve shall ’ave zegrets together, young man. I visper in your ear.”

He bent over the piano and hissed like a kettle at Snaith, who grew redder and more tense every minute. Finally he gave Snaith his card and said, “ You understand ? ”

“ Yes,” whispered the Curate in an awestruck voice.

When Panahard got back to his hotel, after leaving Snaith

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and seeing an artist friend in Avenue Road, he sprang like a lion upon his secretary, Lapin.

" You will zend von tousand letters to all ze noblest riches beeple in London. You will take down vot I zay for a surprize concert, a loffly choke. All 'oo gome to pay von pound at ze door; time half-past nine o'glock. Ivening dress and Orders worn."

" Tell also ze Bress and ze Bicture men. Ziss iss ze blace. Quick, write or I gill you now."

On the morning of the concert, Snaith met Pryce-Morden in the street. He was very well turned out and extremely pleased with himself.

" Hullo, Snaith," he said, " you'll be glad to hear that the Vicar and I have promises for nearly all the reserved seats. I suppose you've got Barnett definitely on the programme now? He's frightfully busy, but he said he'd give up most things to help an old pal."

" Yes, I've got down Barnett," answered Snaith submissively, " and Mrs. Salter's trio too; also the little girl dancers from the Sneed Academy."

" Good," said Morden, " and what about your fiddler friend, is he coming?"

" Yes. I've put him down last on the programme. That'll be alright, won't it?"

" Yes, that'll do. I suppose you're going down to the hall now?"

" Well," said Snaith apologetically. " I've got one or two other jobs to do in connection with the concert."

" Alright, but don't forget you are responsible for all the seating arrangements, and for the programme sellers and stewards. Oh, yes, and the Vicar said you were to put special chairs for Sir Edward's party."

" How many is he bringing?" asked Snaith.

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"I'm sure I don't know, you must use your judgment man," said Pryce-Morden, as he walked away, swinging a smart cane. He didn't see Snaith hail a taxi and say, "Claridge's, please."

All the afternoon and early evening Snaith worked like a nigger at the hall. The night before it had been used for a Carnival Dance ; the floor was thick with paper hats and confetti, cigarette ends and hairpins. Then the piano had to be retuned after maltreatment. Snaith dashed out and dragged an angry tuner in almost by the hair. So it went on.

The floor was scrubbed, the seats fixed in rows, chairs ticketed and numbered. Plants arrived for the platform. Snaith had to tip the men. Once the Vicar looked in.

"Getting on, Snaith ? Don't forget the special chairs."

Later Morden strolled up the hall. "Seats a bit close, aren't they Snaith ? By the way, Lady Kerry needs a footstool. Wish I could give a hand, but I'm dining out early with a party, must change first. Awful bore. I suppose you've got the stands for the trio, most important. Mrs. Salter's semi-professional you know—frightfully touchy."

"That's all fixed, Morden."

The charwomen were all very polite to Pryce-Morden ; they let Snaith carry pails for them everywhere. It seemed natural that he should.

By quarter to eight that evening the hall was coming to life in earnest. Most of the cheap seats were already full, for Snaith had done his work well. Then Morden came in with a smart party of local aristocracy ; he was in clerical evening dress, with what the catalogues call, "a rich ribbed silk waistcoat."

He was apologising loudly that Barnett had sent a wire, crying off at the last moment. "It's always Engagements

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Permitting with these tip-top professionals," he explained wisely.

Snaith had no evening suit, but his frock-coat was carefully brushed and he was standing in the background with a friend similarly dressed. They both wore rather solid black boots with square toes, and Snaith's friend had on very thick disfiguring glasses.

As Pryce-Morden passed them, talking knowingly about professional musicians, the clerical stranger nudged Snaith in the ribs and attempted to wink through his specs. Soon afterwards the Vicar appeared with his wife and other satellites in attendance. He was not in the best of tempers. Sir Edward had let them down, and there were the special chairs and footstool proclaiming a social failure. The red velvet seats looked vulgar and ostentatious ; besides the expensive places were not too well filled. Somebody must be blamed.

"Snaith!"

"Yes, Vicar," said the Curate, emerging from the shadows.

"Those chairs are not at all what I meant. You must use your commonsense, your discretion. You have no idea of social fitness. I trust the other arrangements are more suitable."

Then the Concert began, after some reshuffling of the programme. Barnett's absence upset things, and Mrs. Salter flatly refused to let her trio begin. Snaith came in for more trouble.

"Really, Canon, you ought to let a musical man deal with these things," said Mrs. Salter.

Snaith faded away to the back of the hall as soon as possible, his cheeks burning with shame.

All through the first item his companion whispered in his ear and laughed, until the audience got annoyed, and

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Pryce-Morden was forced to turn round and say “Sshh—Shhh. . .”

It was the usual sort of concert and most people were pretty bored, although they dared not admit it.

Mrs. Salter, who was a self-opinionated amateur fiddler, dragged her trio through the popular work by Arensky. The pianist was loud, hard and unyielding ; the 'cellist, who was not really up to the technique, blurred all the runs and sounded like a rumbling interior. Mrs. Salter, the leader, was a big woman, with white hams for arms, and she had a sort of brazen proficiency which beat on the ears in pitiless fashion. When she wasn't playing she talked a lot about studying abroad under a famous Master, who usually only took professional soloists.

There is no need to describe the whole programme, although it was a high class classical affair, according to local ideas.

For instance a chairman sang “Nazareth,” and spindle shanked, knock-kneed children, in ballet skirts and wreaths of roses, danced to metronomic version of Chopin waltzes.

Snaith's companion groaned and laughed alternately, as the mood took him. During the interval the Vicar made a short speech of thanks to all concerned. He spoke of their glorious old parish Church ; of the need for sacrifice and service. He spoke of Sir Edward, whose unavoidable absence made such a gap in their fellowship. He flowed all over the artists and helpers, “Mrs. Salter, that admirable musician, so Christianly generous with her great gifts. . . . Mr. Kegg, a pillar of our choir . . . those dainty little fairies from Mrs. Sneed's academy . . . my colleague, Mr. Pryce-Morden. . . .” Somehow or other Snaith was left out that night. He was in disgrace for the plush chairs.

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It was the custom of St. Barnabas to have the speech of thanks in the middle of an entertainment, so that the early departures should not miss a treat.

Then they got under way again with a glee by the choir, followed by a recitation from Mrs. Crowhurst, who once studied elocution for two terms. Her morsel was, "How they Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix." And, as somebody said afterwards, "you could almost hear the horses neigh, and the stirrup leathers squeak."

A good many people left after that, and just before half-past nine the better seats were well thinned out. It was almost time for Snaith's friend, the Revd. P. Hard, to play his piece when the purring of a car was heard outside the hall. Then a magnificent gentleman, in full evening dress, with an opera hat and scarlet lined cape, came in and looked round for somebody to take his money. He had four others with him of both genders, and all fruitily immaculate. The men wore medals and two had Orders about their necks on broad ribbons.

The Duke of Alchester, for it was he, flung down a five pound note, and refusing change, stalked up the hall to the plush seats. They were no longer wasted.

Heads craned to stare at them, the throaty tenor in action nearly dried up, but Canon Crowhurst greeted the party effusively. He knew his illustrated papers.

"My dear duke . . . how good . . . how kind . . . our little hall . . . our simple entertainment. . . ." His voice was drowned in the approach of another car, then, another, then another, then another. "One grasshopper jumped upon another grasshopper's back." So the cars rolled up nose to tail in an endless stream, until the hall was choked with ermine and velvet, and opera cloaks and fashionable voices and five pound notes.

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One word predominated. “Panahard. . . .” “Panahard. . . .” “The old rogue’s pulling our legs.” “Where is Panahard?” “What a ghastly place, my dear. Too utterly stinking. Panahard’s mad, of course.”

Crowhurst and Pryce-Morden saw the Bishop pushing in in his velvet cap and violet cassock. They struggled to reach him and were engulfed in the crowd; they were astonished and a little frightened. This looked like a nasty hoax; of course Panahard wasn’t there! They must disclaim any responsibility.

“My dear friends,” shouted Crowhurst, “Panahard is not here. You are under a cruel misapprehension. And although I gladly welcome. . . .”

“Well, we’re damn well waiting here for the old rascal,” said the duke, rudely butting in on the Canon.

Then two meek clergymen pushed through the throng, like moles at a gala night in Ruritania. They were Snaith and his friend, the Revd. P. Hard. Hard had black hair and dark spectacles, in fact the only note of colour upon the pair of them was Snaith’s red hair.

On the programme it said, “Violin solo by the Revd. P. Hard, selected.”

The whole audience watched them, and Hard kept his face away from the light as much as possible, while he tuned rather squeakily and fumbled about with tattered scraps of music.

At last he placed a sheet of music on a stand and began to play. It was the “Londonderry Air,” and it was, oh! so nearly in tune and oh! so painstaking, so suitably rendered. The audience shuddered and shuffled, there was faint clapping and a lot of buzzing talk.

“Panahard?”—“Panahard!”—“This is beyond a joke”

“I came down here after an absurd note from Panahard’s

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secretary." . . . "Let's get off home and kill the old bird when we catch him!"

Then it happened: Mr. Hard took up the music stand and threw it across the platform, after that he tore off his black glasses and his black thatch. His scarlet hair flamed like a halo. Panahard stood superbly on the stage, with Snaith at the piano.

"Zo you vant 'ole Panahard? Hein! You gome to 'ear 'ole Panahard, 'an 'is great fren Mistair Snaith? Goot, you shall 'ear."

And, as he threw off his disguise and spoke, there went up a great gasping roar of laughter and a great rending crash of prolonged applause.

"Panahard—Panahard—PANAHARD!"

Then, in the silence of expectation that followed upon this, came Panahard's voice. "Snaith, too, jhout Snaith, or I gill you and go 'ome."

Uncomprehendingly and good humouredly the crowd obeyed their idol, and there went up another great shout.

"Snaith—Snaith—SNAITH!"

And this was gall and bitterness to Crowhurst and Pryce-Morden, for they could see even the Bishop shouting, "Snaith—Snaith—SNAITH."

And the Bishop just knew who Snaith was. There would be openings for Snaith, perhaps fashionable recognition for Snaith. Snaith would rise and soar upon his long folded wings.

"Now, to pisnezz," said Panahard, and he melted into a Zapateado of Sarasate. There was only one Panahard in the world, nobody could approach his glory. The honeyed smoothness of his tone was never sickly, his deep notes were more satisfying than the love of women, his top register was snatched from Paradise.

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And the stability, the certainty, the flexibility, the variety ! His playing was grander than a Cathedral, more sonorous than the sea, more heart-rending than death, more urgent than kisses.

That night he played for two hours, and it was like ten minutes. And whenever he ceased there was a sigh of broken rapture, too passionate for applause. And always Snaith was at the piano, crisp, deft, humble and accommodating.

It was all over but the shouting. As the spell lifted the shouting began, and it rolled up to the platform in great waves. There they stood, two red-headed Curates in frock coats and dog collars. Panahard's arm was round Snaith's shoulders, and they stood like that for ten full minutes. And that time the shouts for Snaith were spontaneous, he had made him a name in one evening. There was no need for speeches, and, as the poor people of the parish, intermingled with the wealth and nobility and intelligentsia of England, surged out of the Hall, Snaith was swept along between the Duke of Alchester and Panahard into a Daimler. He was carried off in triumph to supper at the Embassy, and Crowhurst and Pryce-Morden were left alone with their bitterness and the caretaker.

"Don't 'e play nicely ?" said that worthy.

The Canon sniffed, Morden lit a cigarette. The press photographers packed up.

Snaith is no longer a Curate. He has an evening suit and uses it a lot, which unnerves the young woman from Yorkshire.

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Aftermath

THE foal stood beside the body of its mother and sniffed the wine-like air guardedly. The sun blazed down on its glistening back and flanks, making it look as though it had been carved from black marble. It was mid-afternoon on an August day. Butterflies flew from cornflower to clover head in this wide field of lush grasses. White and yellow butterflies they were mostly. Occasionally a Red Admiral came to flutter its gorgeous wings gracefully on a wide marguerite.

A wasp droned around the foal's head. It threw up its muzzle and snorted, shaking its long mane as delicately as a woman shakes the fringe of a costly shawl. It stood with head erect and looked around the deserted field. Then it bent and nuzzled the warm body at its feet. It could not understand why its mother did not respond to the feel of its sensitive nose. She lay there with a tiny hole in her side from which a red trickle meandered down to stain the emerald grass beneath.

The firing had ceased at last. No bark of revolver or crack of rifle now shattered the peace of the brooding day. The men who had raked the field with lead from the gate

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beyond had gone. The sky was as blue as the mid-ocean. Clouds sailed across it like yachts dipping before a stiff breeze. A halcyon sky and a halcyon scene. The only indication of man was this bleeding body of a black mare with legs bunched up in the last paroxysm of death.

The foal lifted its head and whinnied. It ran a little way up the field, then ran back again. Now the stain on the grass had grown larger and deeper. It whisked its short tail agitatedly as it pawed at its mother's carcass with a long, shank-like leg. Froth was oozing from the parent's mouth and glazing on the lips which were drawn back from the gaunt teeth.

The foal ran along the low ditch towards the gate in the far corner. Every few minutes it halted in its hesitant trot to stare back at the spot where its mother still lay. It listened eagerly as it ran for the sound of welcome hoof-beats, ever hopeful that the black heap over in the field would spring up and chase after it.

In the mornings and at evening they always raced around the field, mother and son. Their tails streamed out and their ears lay back as though much depended upon victory. Their black bodies shone and flashed above the waving mat of green. Their limbs moved with the grace and force of pistons in a perfectly tuned engine. Many a farm lad leant upon the gate to watch them at play with a glow of admiration in his heart.

But to-day the black figure lay as still as a boulder. The foal glanced back from time to time and whinnied loudly. It reached the gate at the top of the field, but no one came to stroke its neck or to offer it a lump of sugar. Some days ladies on their way to the little chapel beyond leant on the top bar of the gate and proffered a tit-bit with many caresses of light warm hands and soft words of endearment. To-day

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no one came. Everything was strangely quiet. As still as death itself after the bedlam of an hour ago, when even the very lark had been scared back to its nest.

The foal trotted down by the far ditch towards the high grove of laurels which backed on to the chapel. Horse-flies followed it relentlessly and stung its sweating flanks viciously. It scarcely heeded them, so desperate was its loneliness. When it came abreast of the laurels, it paused in its trot. A human voice had reached its sharp ears. It listened intently, hardly daring to blow breath through its nostrils. The voice came again, ceased, then droned once more. The foal stepped primly up to the wire fence which bounded the laurel grove and gazed into the dense mass of spear-headed leaves.

The three men sat stiffly in the centre of the grove. They wore trench coats blackened with oil and muddied all over. One had a cap pulled down almost to his eyebrows. The others had soft hats with down-turned brims.

Two of them held revolvers in their hands. The one with the cap had a Thompson gun resting across his knees. A half-loaded drum of ammunition was in position.

The three men had the hunted look of escaped convicts. Their hands and faces were torn. One had a red weal across his left cheek caused by a swinging branch. They were all smoking furtively, holding half-Woodbines cupped in their free hands and inhaling deeply.

"They're gone by now," one said at last. "I heard the armoured car drive away twenty minutes ago."

"Don't ye be too sure!" answered the one with the cap. "They're cunnin' beggars, them 'Tans."

"Why the hell didn't Gallagher say there was an armoured car bein' sent out, anyway?" groused the third.

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"Probably he didn't know," observed the man with the cap laconically.

"Yah! Not much *he* don't know! He's runnin' with the hare an' huntin' with the hounds, that fella!"

"This is the first time an ambush has failed in these parts," remarked one of the hatted men.

"An' it'll be the last time we'll take a tip-off from Gallagher!" snarled the man with the cap viciously. "I'll plug him meself for this!"

"It's a miracle we're not all plugged, Shamus, with that car turnin' up the way it did!"

"It is that, b'God!"

One by one they finished their cigarettes and crushed the glowing butts into the soft leaf-mould.

"Let's get out of here!" said the man who seemed to be the leader.

The two hatted men pocketed their revolvers. All three made a move towards rising to their feet. Then a sound like someone brushing against leaves came to them from the fence at the edge of the little grove.

They crouched down and peered through the overcrowded branches. They were about thirty yards from the fence and they could not see clearly owing to the dense mass of leaves which made the centre of the grove almost sunless. The revolvers were drawn cautiously from the trench-coat pockets. Over at the fence there was movement and a glint such as a highly-polished police belt would make in the sunrays.

Beads of cold perspiration sprang out on the brow of each man. "A blasted 'Tan!'" hissed the one with the cap. He lifted the Thompson gun to his shoulder as though it were a rifle and pressed the trigger. "Cha-cha-cha-cha-cha!" said the gun.

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The foal threw up its head as the bullets ploughed into its chest. It whinnied softly with wonderment. It did not understand this thing that barked so quickly, nor this burning pain which stabbed it through and through. It tried to back away from the fence, but it found that its limbs were powerless. It made an attempt to raise its head once more, but now the long muzzle sagged down like a weighted sack. It saw red streaks on its chest and forelegs. Its eyes glazed over and a delirious blinding pain drove up to the top of its skull. It crashed against the fence. The field and the grove and the whole world spun round and round and round. Then the sun went black.



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The Two Livings

“I QUITE agree with you,” said Doctor Serocold. “The two parishes ought to be united. It’s perfectly obvious that one parson could do the work of both ; there isn’t three quarters of a mile as the crow flies between the two churches. People can choose for themselves which service they prefer. One stipend is two-fifty and the other’s four hundred ; if you join the two you make up quite a decent living. It’s a reasonable, useful and desirable reform and it ought to have been carried out years ago. All I say is, mark my words, you’ll have trouble somewhere before you’ve finished.” He smiled his grim, wary, tolerant, experienced smile and repeated, “human nature . . . human nature . . .”

He was having a friendly discussion with Sir John Garrick, the patron of the Holt Abbas living, over the proposed amalgamation of that parish with its neighbour, Holt Regis. The two parishes, adjacent on the map, were separated by the Dodder trout-stream and by half a mile of water-meadows, in summer a carpet of iris, forget-me-not and peppermint, in winter a sheet of standing silver ; they were united by a raised causeway and an immensely long, white-railed, wooden bridge, which nevertheless did not prevent the Holt Regis children, who had no school of their own, from wetting their

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feet going and coming and so making more work for Doctor Serocold. "You can't evade natural boundaries," maintained the doctor out of his thirty years' experience. "There's always been a sort of rivalry between the two villages and it's only to be expected. They go different ways. Holt Abbas is a big, prosperous village on the main road, full of shops and traffic, with one or two big houses in it and chiefly populated by tradespeople; Holt Regis is a down-village of half a dozen cottages and a few outlying farms. If you look at the list of voters you'll see a couple of farmers and a blacksmith, perhaps, or a keeper; the rest are all labourers. The Holt Regis people go down their own side of the valley to Appleton when they want to shop; and the Holt Abbas people take the bus to Canley when they want to go to the pictures. If Holt Regis had been joined to Appleton there'd have been some sense in it."

"That's never been suggested," said the patron. "This was the bishop's own idea and we've had it all out with the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. Appleton is a college living and there won't be a vacancy there for many years; Conybeare is quite a young man. Whereas at Holt Regis or Holt Abbas. . . ."

"There might be a vacancy at any time, with luck," the doctor suggested. Sir John looked distressed by his bluntness. "Of course," he stammered, "we hope nothing of the kind will occur at present."

"But you think it as well to be prepared. Hmm. . . ." The old man grunted, as was his habit. "Well, Delahaye's barely sixty, but he's a full-blooded, irritable, apoplectic type, always working himself up into a state about something unimportant. Fletcher's getting on for seventy and pretty fragile; but he leads a very gentle, pottering life, never quarrels with anyone and thinks of nothing but his Gregorian

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chants and his Samian ware. I really don't know which you'd better put your money on." He added in his sardonic fashion, "They're both my patients, so it's to my interest to preserve their lives as long as possible. You mustn't expect me to clear the ground for you in either case. I gather that if either of them dies or resigns the other is to get both livings."

"That is what has been arranged." Sir John blew out his cheeks and assumed an air of dignified reproof. "He is to take his choice of the Holt Regis rectory or the Holt Abbas vicarage, and the rejected house is to be let or sold."

"Very neat," commented the doctor. "Now let me prophesy. If old Fletcher catches pneumonia watching the excavations up at the Roman camp, Delahaye will jump at the chance of a big, modern house right on the main road, with electric light and drains and so forth. He won't care how ugly and noisy it is, or how hideous that new church of theirs looks. He'll devote himself to those rich people who took Carfax last year and get subscriptions out of them for all his charitable works. And to do him justice he'll work like a black in both parishes, getting the clubs and schools and societies on their legs again and working up a good congregation with his noisy sermons. He's always felt that his energies were rather wasted at Holt Regis. Now poor Fletcher is a saint on earth, but the does rather neglect his parish duties. He's found the work of a big parish like Holt Abbas a sad burden and he's left everything he could to that dear, devoted wife of his. He's too shy to visit and too philosophic to preach a sermon fit for a village. He's all theology and speculation and never happy outside the four walls of his study. He ought to have been a don. He'd ask nothing better than to bury himself in that exquisite little Queen Anne rectory at Holt Regis, with the Saxon

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chapel in the garden, and forgot that his second parish existed. He could pay a curate out of the two stipends. That's what he'll do if Delahaye breaks his neck riding on the downs, or blows the top of his head off with rage at a diocesan meeting because somebody's contradicted him. Really, you know, they're a couple of square pegs in round holes. What they ought to do is just simply to exchange parishes."

Sir John took this sarcasm perfectly seriously. "That has never been suggested," he declared weightily; "It would be quite impossible, even if Mrs. Merriman, who owns the advowson of Holt Regis, would agree to the exchange. Holt Regis is only worth two hundred and fifty pounds a year and Mr. Fletcher could not afford to take it. He still has his boy and two girls to put out in the world, though, of course, things must be easier for him since Angela married and Phyllis got that teaching post."

"Yes, poor devil," said the doctor. "He's had a struggle. I don't know sometimes how they've managed. Now Delahaye's a bachelor and has private means." He knew the affairs of both households; he had even taken a part, some years earlier, in the elder girl's marriage, of which Sir John spoke. "An extra few hundred a year would mean a lot to the Fletchers," he mused.

"A more active parson would mean a lot to Holt Abbas," said Sir John, unconsciously betraying his sympathies.

"Ah, well," the doctor concluded, rising to take his leave, "we shall see what happens, but we may have to wait several years."

II

They waited one year, and two, and three. There was a good deal of discussion at first in the two villages when the arrangement was made known and it was criticised from all

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angles. The Holt Abbas people were inclined to patronise their neighbours and to assume that they themselves would take the line in future parochial activities. There was plenty of speculation about the number of church services which could be allotted to each congregation. It was pleasant and common enough for the Holt Abbas people to walk across the meadows to the Saxon chapel at Holt Regis for evensong on summer Sundays : but the Holt Regis people had no wish to make the same journey on two Sunday mornings out of three, when the winter wind screeched down the valley and the greasy chalk causeway was isolated by floods. The Reverend William Delahaye was an admirable forceful preacher, a vigorous organiser, a conscientious, broad-minded, upright man whose many admirers thought him wasted on his tiny parish ; he was supposed to be destined at least for a shovel-hat and gaiters, if not for an apron and mitre, and it was only a few thoughtful critics here and there who detected the flavour of personal ambition in his enthusiasms. The Reverend James Fletcher was a diffident and unpractical saint, a scholar and archæologist of great learning, much modesty and little public renown ; a meek, devout, innocent dreamer, as wax in the hands of his determined children and his devoted, managing wife. There could not have been two men less similar ; and it was inevitable that a certain rivalry, amiable at first, later becoming acrimonious, should arise between the two parties which hoped for their respective survival.

Both men, however, continued their accustomed ministry and the prospect of the parish amalgamation receded. Neither of the two resigned, died, or showed signs of continued ill-health. Mr. Delahaye did have a slight accident, not while riding discreetly on the downs, as was his custom on a hunting morning, but when driving his car out of the

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rectory gate. He was run into by the chauffeur from Carfax, who was driving the Chalkes' big Daimler at his usual fifty to meet the stockbroker at Canley Junction. Mr. Delahaye, however, escaped with a couple of broken ribs, from being flung against the steering-wheel, and a touch of concussion which would have cleared up more quickly if he had respected Doctor Serocold's veto on sermons and committees for a few weeks longer than he did. He was, however, involved at that time in many public activities and did not wish it to be supposed that a substitute could easily be found for him ; so he endured his throbbing headaches and the confused irritability from which he suffered without admitting his own discomfort.

Mr. Fletcher did not get pneumonia ; it was his wife who did that, attending a Women's Institute lecture in the over-heated parish room at Holt Abbas and walking home afterwards through a November night in her thin coat. She did not die, however, though she came near enough to it to fetch her daughter Angela home from Paris ; but Doctor Serocold, who had steered her through the attack with infinite care and skill, admitted that she would never be the same woman again. "No more gardening," he told her sternly, "no more cooking and cleaning to save a servant, no more district visiting this winter and no more early services or committees or mothers' meetings. You've got to be absolutely idle for a time, Mrs. Fletcher. I don't want to frighten you, but you must take that heart of yours seriously. When the weather gets warm again we'll see what it can do."

She was delicately, wilfully rebellious, as he had known that she would be ; he told her husband of his anxieties, but only succeeded in terrifying the old man and distressing her. "You mustn't worry James about me," she insisted, in her

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weak and loving voice, lying back on her pillows with the troubled red coming and going in her cheeks. " You've made him think that I'm going to die and I won't have it. I've no intention of dying to please a doctor. My family can't do without me."

Doctor Serocold entirely agreed with her girlish, self-satisfied boast ; he really did not know how that dishevelled household could survive without Mrs. Fletcher. " She's never spared herself," he thought, " and she doesn't know how to begin. I shall have my work cut out to prevent her killing herself."

He was distinctly short with Mr. Delahaye, who came to consult him next day on some trifling matter and was a little too inquisitive about Mrs. Fletcher's recovery. " I wonder Fletcher doesn't move to some warmer climate," said the portly, red-faced, majestic clergyman, in a voice which negatived argument, but roused Doctor Serocold to rebellion. " Holt Abbas is a damp, low-lying sort of place. He ought to consider his wife's health and not oblige her to live there. The vicarage lawn runs right down to the river, and the garden is crowded out with all those Portugal laurels. There's no light or air. It must be most unhealthy."

Doctor Serocold knit his grizzled eyebrows. " I've always thought it a very pleasant house," he said, evading other issues, and thought, " From all I hear, you'd be glad enough to get it."

" It would need a good deal spending on it to make it really comfortable," mused the other, with an air which betrayed his private calculations.

" I suppose you've got it all planned out," thought the doctor, remarking aloud, " Well, perhaps the next incumbent will be able to make some improvements. It's a large house, of course, and suits the Fletchers on that account. Now

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your charming little rectory at Holt Regis is just the right size for a single man."

"Cramped," sighed the rector, "cramped . . ." and proceeded to the tale of his own symptoms, which were neither so decided nor so important as to take up much of Doctor Serocold's attention. "The fellow's pretty well got over that smash he had last year," was his professional reflection, as he released the air-pressure in the apparatus buckled round his patient's upper arm and felt the full, returning beat at the wrist. "Nothing seriously wrong with his blood-pressure now; if he'd only look at life with a trifle more tolerance he could outlive poor Fletcher by fifteen years. I'm sorry; this man gets my back up, somehow, I don't know why; and I'd like to think that the Fletchers were going to end up in a little more comfort. However, I dare-say it'll be the best thing for the two parishes if Delahaye is the survivor."

He drove out next day to Holt Regis and discussed the whole situation with Angela Catterick, the married daughter. He had great confidence in this tall, fair, composed young woman; and he discovered that, as usual, she had something sensible to propose. She was a fashion-artist by trade; and she was going to move her blind husband and their little girl from her Paris flat to the Riviera for the winter. "I can sketch clothes and notions just as easily there for my paper," said she. "The sun will do us all good and we can live just as cheaply as in Neuilly if we choose a little hotel in a back street away from the sea. I've got a good offer from some Americans for the flat for the winter. If mother would come out with us for three or four months it would be the best thing in the world for her; but you're the only man in the world who could persuade her to leave Father."

Doctor Serocold fully realised the force of this objection,

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and he devoted three quarters of an hour, on a very busy day, to coaxing Mrs. Fletcher into accepting the plan. He realized, with a touch of grim pity, that the Fletchers had never been parted for more than a few days in all their long married life ; he felt as guilty as he did when he was obliged to admit some old country couple to the divided and melancholy shelter of the infirmary wards. "Five months isn't very long," he repeated with an unconvincing, cheerful smile ; he knew that it would seem interminable to both.

Mrs. Fletcher was gradually won to a tremulous flutter of anticipation ; her husband accepted all that was told him with a submissive and forlorn docility which touched the doctor's heart. "I hardly know how we shall get on without her," he sighed, passing through the churchyard with Doctor Serocold, and blinking round him at its crooked, mossy tombs. "You poor soul," thought Serocold, "I feel as if I'd cut off your right hand. . . ."

III

Mrs. Fletcher went and from all accounts the change was very good for her. She wrote childish, delighted letters, full of sun and sea ; she continued to lament her enforced absence, but promised to serve her sentence and not come home till after Easter. Doctor Serocold was perfectly happy about her, it was Mr. Fletcher who worried him. The old man did not fall into any actual ill-health, but all through that solitary winter he fretted pitifully, shutting himself up in his study and neglecting even his beloved antiquities. Doctor Serocold encouraged Phyllis, the daughter in charge, as much as possible, but he was not happy about his old friend ; and it vexed him exceedingly when he found that someone had been spreading a rumour of Mr. Fletcher's impending resignation about Holt Abbas. "Breaking up fast, Parson is,"

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declared old Mrs. Gathercole. "Come next Easter, they tell me we'll have the reverend Delahaye at the Vicarage. That'll be a sad change, that will"; while Boult, the butcher and vicar's churchwarden, declared, "Between you and me, Doctor, it'll be no bad thing for the parish if we can get a new man with a little more life in him. Everything's been at sixes and sevens lately. Mrs. Fletcher, she kept everything pretty straight, but Mr. Fletcher, he's fair lost without her." And when the doctor protested to Miss Perkins, who ran all the good works of the village, that he had heard nothing of this proposed resignation, she tossed her grey, untidy head, pursed her thin lips and told him sharply, "Well, if Mr. Fletcher hasn't made up his mind to go, someone should make it up for him. He's past his work." Doctor Serocold had never fully appreciated Miss Perkins and on this occasion he felt that he disliked her more than usual; he hoped that Mr. Fletcher would disappoint her for as long as possible. He was profoundly distressed when he realized that she, or someone like her, had betrayed the feeling in the village to his old friend, whose simple, unsuspecting mind was always incapable of resisting criticism.

"My dear Serocold," faltered Mr. Fletcher to him on his next visit, "I fear I shall be obliged to resign. My parish work is becoming altogether too much for me." Doctor Serocold combated this delusion with his accustomed vigour and vexation. "Come, Fletcher, you're talking nonsense. You musn't think of retiring for ten years yet. You're merely suffering from a little temporary depression. What you want is a holiday." But he found that he made little impression on the innocent and sensitive self-distrust of his hearer, who continued to lament, "I can't manage it all as I used to do. I don't feel that I'm doing what people have a

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right to expect. Somehow everything has gone wrong since Mary went away."

Doctor Serocold went home in a bad temper. He wanted to blame Mr. Delahaye for the growth of this rumour, but he had no grounds for doing so, only an indefinite, obstinate suspicion based on nods and winks. He would have liked to send Mr. Fletcher out to join his wife, but he knew that this was impossible ; he felt, as he had often done before in his practice, that an increased income was the only prescription which would do his patient any good.

Matters were at this stage when the kaleidoscope was suddenly shifted by the death of a certain Canon Morley.

This elderly divine, with whom Doctor Serocold was but slightly acquainted, had been for many years a canon of the neighbouring cathedral town of Wilchester. His unexpected fit of apoplexy released one of the major canonries, with a stipend of seven hundred a year and a small but perfect William and Mary house on the sunny side of the close, whose double row of white-sashed windows commanded the noisy rookery in the Dean's elm-trees, the double lime-avenue, known as the Twelve Apostles, and the great, four-square, embattled tower of the cathedral, more like a fort than a church. It did not take so astute an observer as Doctor Serocold very long to detect the flavour of a new possibility in the talk which reached him as he went his rounds. He had several patients on his list that week at Holt Abbas, where an influenza epidemic had kept him busy, and he soon gathered that Mr. Delahaye, having enlarged his ambitions, would gladly relinquish his chance of the two livings if he could become a Canon of Wilchester.

"Upon my soul," thought Serocold, "I don't like the fellow, but I could wish him luck for Fletcher's sake. He'll be a firebrand in the Close, but he'll clear the way for my poor

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friend if he goes. All this talk would soon die down if he were out of the way, I firmly believe. I don't know much about church patronage : I don't know whether this kind of job is managed by the bishop, or the dean, or the Prime Minister ; but if I could pull a string in the matter I swear I'd do it."

He smiled at himself, but he was not altogether in fun. He made enquiries and discovered that the stalls at Wilchester were filled by the bishop, whom he met at least a dozen times a year on charitable business. This checked him for a day or so ; he was not easily frightened, but he had a profound and somewhat uncomfortable respect for the bishop of Wilchester, whose penetrating and thoughtful gaze, directed from beneath a pair of oddly uneven, black-and-white eyebrows, had the power of making most requests appear inopportune. An accidental meeting, however, involved him in the enterprise which he would hardly have begun of himself ; the bishop attended the annual meeting at the almshouses, of which Doctor Serocold was the medical officer, and invited him over to the palace next day, to discuss certain sanitary reforms which the doctor had at heart. And, " Damn it all," thought Serocold, " I don't like interfering in what isn't my business, but if I get the chance I'll say a word to him about Delahaye. He can but tell me that it's no concern of mine."

He drove the twelve miles into Wilchester next day, by a road which took him through Holt Abbas, and fortified his resolution by a glance at the shuttered windows of Canon Morley's house in the Close ; but he had to keep all his wits about him when he entered the bishop's book-lined study and found himself involved in the usual shower of soft, deceptively simple enquiries about the almshouse drains, food, ventilation and politics, the sobriety and conduct of

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its inhabitants and the legal and financial complications of the sixteenth-century bequest which provided for their welfare. He kept his head, however, well enough, scored several points, acknowledged one well-merited defeat, but secured two more promises than he had expected and remained, on the whole, well pleased with the results of his interview.

IV

There remained time enough, when the subject of the bedesmen had been exhausted, to broach his other pre-occupation, as the two men sat together in the firelit room. "Don't hurry, Serocold," the bishop had said, glancing at the clock. "My next visitor won't appear for twenty minutes." And he had added in parenthesis, "If everyone kept to the point as you do, my engagements would become much more numerous. I find that I have to allow so much time for people to talk round their subject." Then he had settled himself in his chair, crossed one gaitered leg over another, folded his hands upon them and enquired, "What's the gossip in your part of the diocese? I imagine you collect as much of it as you always did." They were, as has been said, old acquaintances, almost old friends.

Doctor Serocold had a steady pulse, but it jumped once before he replied, "Our chief excitement at the moment is this question of Holt Abbas and Holt Regis."

The bishop nodded thoughtfully. "Of course, that's just your neighbourhood. I daresay you hear all that goes on. There seems to be a good deal of local feeling."

"I wonder if you quite realise how much," thought Doctor Serocold, while he replied, "It's right in the middle of my practice. I've watched the whole business from the beginning. I always told Garrick there'd be trouble over it." ("No harm," he said to himself, "in giving myself

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all the authority I can. I shall need it.") He did not flatter himself that it would be easy to influence the man opposite, who was already raising those black-and-white eyebrows and objecting, "It all seemed quite an amicable arrangement at first. I was given to understand that both parishes had agreed to the arrangement."

"So they did," nodded the doctor, collecting his forces for the attack. "At the beginning it was all friendly enough; people had their little jokes about it . . . made bets on the survivor, as it were . . . got quite excited when either of the two men had a cold. . . . Fletcher wasn't so seriously considered; people naturally expected Delahaye to outlive him and Delahaye seemed the right man for the job. He's so infernally energetic and enthusiastic and progressive," said the doctor, betraying his prejudices with a shamefaced grin. "It was all pleasant enough until quite lately. It's only within the last few months that people have begun to work themselves up about the whole business and take sides and try to hurry the matter. It was a frightful shock to Fletcher when he found it out. It would never occur to him that someone was working against him underground. He's always been only too ready to mistrust himself, and he shrinks from any kind of competition. He's miserable about the whole crisis and only wants to be allowed to resign."

"Perhaps he'd better," suggested the bishop, in a tone of gentle enquiry. Doctor Serocold retorted, "Why should a gentle, honourable, learned, pious man be hustled out of sight, just to please a few discontented, malicious old women and gratify a younger man's ambition?" They eyed each other and the bishop stated austerely, "You feel strongly about the matter."

His look was penetrating; it might have alarmed a timid man. Doctor Serocold overcame a distinct tremor of apprehension.

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He conquered it and observed, "I do ; probably because I myself am old."

The bishop grunted, "Ha ! you don't look it."

"We're none of us as young as we were," retorted Serocold, inspecting his contemporary with a grim satisfaction. "But there's plenty of good work in me yet and so there is in Fletcher, if the grumblers would leave him alone to do it. He daren't think so himself, because at the moment he's depressed by poor health and family anxieties. He can't afford to resign that living, but he's tormented by this suggestion that he's past his work. I'd guarantee to make him fit for it if I could give him a six month's holiday and another two hundred a year ; but that's a difficult prescription to enforce." He smiled drily.

The bishop asked, "Do you suggest that any special person is at the bottom of this agitation against Mr. Fletcher ?" Doctor Serocold, choosing his words, replied, "I have no right to say so." The bishop accepted this, sighed, tapped with his fingers on his desk, and remarked, "Of course you know that Mr. Delahaye has been suggested to me as a successor to Canon Morley." He did not say by whom ; the doctor, summoning all his courage, remarked boldly, "I hope he'll get it."

"Why ?"

This was undoubtedly a difficult question to answer ; the tone in which it was put made Serocold think, "I've made a mess of this." Falling back into a certain calculated bluntness, in which he believed, he blurted, "I'd like him out of Fletcher's way."

The bishop considered this and commented, "Several people . . . several other people . . . have tried to influence me in Mr. Delahaye's favour ; but none from quite that point of view." His manner was extremely dry ; Serocold

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could only mumble sulkily, “ He’d make quite a good Canon.”

“ I daresay he would,” the bishop agreed. “ If an energetic organiser, an admirable preacher and a comparatively young and vigorous man were all that is needed for the post.” He set off the points precisely, one by one, on his joined fingers, gazing at Doctor Serocold. “ If Mr. Delahaye were to become a Canon of Wilchester, the livings of Holt Regis and Holt Abbas would then naturally fall to Mr. Fletcher, who should be able to afford such occasional help as would enable him to satisfy the demands of both congregations. Is that your plan ? ” He paused and Doctor Serocold reluctantly admitted it. “ I thought you had some such notion up your sleeve,” declared the bishop in a manner which heartened Doctor Serocold mysteriously and indescribably. He blinked, but said nothing ; he was not a man to commit himself unnecessarily. In a moment more his heart leapt like a flame ; “ If Mr. Fletcher were to be made a Canon . . . ” the bishop continued.

Doctor Serocold could no longer contain himself ; he let out a short, deep, triumphant exclamation, but the gleam in the bishop’s eye caused him to stifle it immediately. “ If Mr. Fletcher were to be made a Canon of Wilchester,” the bishop repeated with deliberation, “ we should welcome one who you yourself described as a gentle . . . pious . . . honourable and learned man.” He lingered upon each of the doctor’s adjectives with enjoyment, concluding, “ And I think, of the two, he would be the more peaceful neighbour in the Close.”

He leant back and observed with satisfaction the amazement of his visitor, who gaped, shook his head, broke out into a cackle of delighted relief and ejaculated, “ Well I’m damned . . . ”

“ I trust not,” said the bishop suavely . . .

GUY DENT

Travelling Companions

IN Genoa the sun was bright but it was not warm. The travellers waiting their train in the Custom's shed moved about restlessly. They spoke in discontented English voices. They said it was as cold as England in March.

In Italy it was March.

A gentleman near the end of the line became suddenly very angry. He commenced to talk bad Italian very fluently in a loud voice, and he smacked his passport several times upon the table. I do not know what was the matter. He was a small man with a very accurate moustache. He might have been a retired colonel ; his face looked that kind. A little woman with an improbable figure said a great deal to him in a soothing voice, but I do not think he heard. I suppose she was his wife. His clothes were dribbling over the edge of his open box. Evidently he wore body-belts.

The official who marked my two boxes was very courteous and very beautifully dressed. I raised my hat to him and began to follow my porter towards the sunshine.

I was glad to get out of the shade. It was spring but there was a cold wind.

The taxis in Italy are built nearer to the ground than in England. They have more curve to the roof. That day they

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looked like great scarlet beetles . . . shiny, with black heads.

I climbed into one scarlet beetle, and my porter arranged the boxes on the seat opposite. He said, "Thank you," and ran away very quickly.

At Genoa Principal station another porter sweated my things into a high-up train. There was already a lady in the carriage. She was dressed in grey with black patent-leather shoes. She moved her feet slightly as I stepped over but she did not turn her head. She was looking out of the window. She was not looking at anything ; she was just looking. I was annoyed to find someone else in my carriage ; but the porter had disappeared.

I went to the far side and sat down.

The principal station at Genoa is all brown, varnished wood inside. Most stations in Italy are like that inside. They look like toffee. This station looked ill.

Just before the train started another lady got in. She was dressed in black and had a lot of luggage. She sat down in the corner next the corridor and opposite the lady in grey. I thought she looked nice.

"Do you know what time we get to Santa Margherita ? " she asked.

The lady in grey went on looking out of the window ; perhaps she was deaf. The lady in black glanced across at me with a little, questioning smile.

"About a quarter to six," I said. "It takes about three-quarters of an hour by this train. This is a fast train. We get in about a quarter to six."

"Thank you," said the lady, "I get off there."

She arranged her hands in her lap. She re-arranged her hands. Then she cupped her chin on one palm and peered through the window. Beyond the window, her side, was

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the corridor, then more glass, then the grey platform. On the grey platform were little groups of people, with fixed faces, trying to look amiable until the train went, back of them were the brown station walls.

The lady dropped her hands again to her lap. Then she got up and began to pull about the numerous packages in the big rack above her head. Her gloved hands darted here and there like funereal lizards. She picked up two sunshades and a shooting-stick tied together like a Fascist symbol. She disentangled them from the label on a hat-box, and slid them into the smaller rack below the big one.

Then she sat down again and arranged her hands in her lap. She did not like the new way any better. She peeled off her black gloves and tried it that way for a while.

I saw all this ; I was not looking, but I saw it all.

The train left Genoa Principal station and commenced to go very fast.

On my side the sea was abruptly across a road beyond some houses.

First the road, then the houses, then the sea. But the sea only in abrupt sections through the gaps between the houses.

Just before Genova-Sturla, the residential suburb of Genoa, I saw the full sweep of the sea. It was a high sea. It was discoloured by the earthen gleanings of the waves from the shore. The bright afternoon sun shone upon the tawny crests. Far out, a big ship, similar to that which had brought me to Italy, shaped a course for Naples. The smoke from its funnels smeared the horizon for a great distance.

I felt the lady in black looking at me. I felt the lady in black looking at the lady in grey. I felt she was very psychic. I felt she did not like the other lady.

I was not watching, but I felt all this.

The train went very fast. The wind beat continually

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upon the glass by my face, and we went through many tunnels.

"It is lucky," said the lady in black, "that the trains are electric in Italy." She was talking to me because the lady opposite her was still looking out of the window.

"Yes," I said, "there's no smoke. One need not shut the window every time."

We shot out of the latest tunnel and ran along beneath a tall hill. The hillside was covered with grey olive trees, not yet dusty, and there were cherry-trees amongst them in new laundered white bodices all sparkling and gay.

Suddenly the lady in grey began to laugh. She laughed quite a good deal.

I looked across the carriage out of her window, and saw that we were driving through a small station with a curious name which I forgot now. There were a lot of Z's in it.

The wind was playing with the skirts of some foreign women standing upon the platform. I knew they were not Italian women because the natives of such a small place would not be wearing those sort of clothes so early in the year. Their skirts showed a perverse tendency to ascend to heaven. The women were holding them down with difficulty.

The lady in grey, ignoring the lady opposite her, turned her head towards me. She will still laughing.

"They don't need so much trouble with their souls," she said. Then I saw that she was only laughing with her mouth, her eyes were quite different.

I had thought, from the colouring and from her silence, that she was herself Italian. I was a little astonished, and did not know what to say.

The lady in black flashed a small, malicious glance at me. I knew she did not like the lady in grey.

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But as the lady immediately turned back her head to look again out of the window I saw I need not further search for correct words. It was the first movement I had seen her make and then she only moved her head. Her body remained set and her fingers clung all the time to the little padded shelf just below the window. She was holding on very tightly, and the second joint of all her fingers was arched and rigid beneath the thin film of grey kid. They were thin fingers, and they looked like the grey claws of a bird.

A ticket collector came along the corridor and saluted us all very politely.

He looked approvingly from beneath the peak of his uniform cap at the red-plush upholstery of the carriage. He thought it all reflected much credit upon his country. His eyes said as much.

The lady in black and I extended our slips of pasteboard which he clipped after a perfunctory examination. The other lady did not move. She said something very rapidly in Italian and the official nodded and went away.

I looked out of the window once more and was very pleased to see that we were far down the coast towards Portofino Cape. The stations through which we passed looked very healthy. There were some nice villas with bright pictures painted on them, and, now and then, a flaming judas-tree in a garden. The sea was merrily attacking the land.

"I like the judas-tree," said the lady in black suddenly. I turned round and saw she was now looking out my side.

Her hands were flat upon the cushions each side of her. She had long fingers with curiously wide tips. The broad tips spoilt the look of her hands.

She didn't seem to like them either. For directly she saw I was looking at them she re-arranged them and, after some fumbling, put on her gloves.

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"Are you going to Santa Margherita, too?" she asked.

I realised then that I had made no kind of reply to her last remark. I felt rather guilty about it.

"Yes," I said, "and then on to Portofino."

"Will you be there for the *festa*?"

"I hope so," I said.

"Oh, I wish I could be," she said, "but I can't spare the time."

"It's pretty good. It's their great day. San Giorgio day."

"They carry huge crosses about, don't they? Old men carry them?"

"That's right," I said, "they pay to. They get off a thousand years of purgatory—or something. There's keen competition."

The lady in grey jerked herself around in one fierce, flowing movement.

"Why can't women carry them, too?" she demanded. "Don't women want to get off purgatory, too? Why shouldn't they have the chance?"

She was looking at me pretty hard. I didn't like the look of her eyes much. She ignored the lady in black and stared at me.

"Well," I said, "the women follow behind and sing—"

"Anyway," she interrupted, "they can't get off hell like that. Not by carrying crosses. Not so easily as that."

She slumped back against the red upholstery and began again to look out of the window her side.

The other lady looked from her to me and back with a faint, malicious smile. It seemed to me she had some private information about the lady in grey.

"On San Giorgio Day—" I began. Then I saw that no one was taking any more interest, so I stopped and picked

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up my copy of the *Daily Mail*. Sir Joseph and Lady Bloggs, I read, had arrived at the Hotel Magnifico at Mentone. Helen Wills-Moody was going great in practice matches for her attack on the Wimbledon Championship. In New Zealand an earthquake had eaten up three small towns in a night.

I turned to the pictures. I read what was written, both in English and French, beneath each. There was one picture of folk skating on some lake near London and a blurred picture of the six-year-old daughter of a fireman, whose father had been killed on holiday trying to stop a runaway horse and lorry.

I thought it all very interesting.

At Camogli the lady in black got up and began to pile her luggage on the floor and on the seat at her side.

I said something about the beauty of the country around here.

It turned out that she had once rented a villa on the hill-side up amongst the chestnuts towards Portofino-Vetta. But the garden had been a disappointment, so that year she was going to try Santa Margherita. Some friends of hers had been there a few seasons back and had been very well pleased. They said it was quite gay.

"Gay!" said the other woman without turning her head.
"Gaiety comes from within."

The lady in black smiled at me as though we were sharers in a secret. She was continually plunging her funereal hands through and through her heap of small parcels on the seat; fingering them. I imagined she must be a nervous type.

We dived through the last tunnel. The painted villas began to run less swiftly past the train, though they did not seem in the least tired.

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The lady looked across and then leaned sideways towards me.

"Do you know . . . ?" she commenced in a low voice, ". . . who——?" She stopped and looked over her shoulder.

I, too, glanced over at the woman about whom my companion was evidently attempting a confidence. She was not looking at us. She was staring beyond the corridor; beyond the olive clad hills; beyond time into timeless memories. I thought, however, she knew all that was taking place in the carriage. I thought she knew all that was happening in Italy—in the world. I thought that she and the grave fly balancing on the window-pane were partners in a spaceless secret more profound than any I could ever bear to hear. I thought she was a very dangerous type. I thought she knew things.

Then the train was beside the grey slip of platform set between two rows of lines, and then stopped, and I handed out luggage to porters who came up to the windows.

As I followed the lady in black down the steps of the carriage, I paused a moment. I just felt like saying something.

"Do you go far?" I began, turning back to the quiet figure in the corner.

"I don't know," she said, still peering out with her face from me. "I don't know at all." She stopped. "I just don't know," she concluded flatly.

I forgot what I was going to say and had no time to think of anything fresh for my porter was yelling for me.

As I went down the slope to the subway, the lady in black came up with me.

"Do you know who that was?" she asked, jerking her head back at the train which was already in motion.

"No," I said.

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"You remember that case," she said, "last spring in the West of England. The woman who poisoned her husband, but got off through lack of evidence?"

"Ah!" I said, "Was that —?"

"Yes," she said with a grin.

"Poor thing," I said.

Just then her porter dropped one or two of her packages which delayed her a little so that I mounted the further steps to the daylight somewhat ahead. I had seen Jack waiting for me.

When Jack saw me he called out.

"Hullo!" he said.

"Hullo," I said, "you look well."

"I am. Never better in my life."

Just then the lady in black came slowly up the steps.

She started to smile when she saw me waiting there. Then she saw Jack, and after one startled look began to fumble in her handbag. She went by us very quickly without saying "Good-bye."

"Do you know who that was?" asked Jack, staring after her.

"No," I said.

"You remember that case," said Jack, "last year at Marblethorpe in the West of England. Woman fed her husband with arsenic, but they couldn't fix it on her."

"You don't say —!"

"Yes," said Jack. "That's her all right. I was Marshal then to old Jimmy Hartopp who tried the case. I knew her at once."

"Poor thing," I said.

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The Pythoness

INTEREST in Spiritualism need not imply that an inquirer has the religious temperament. He may attend meetings of a circle for half a dozen reasons ; curiosity as to the next life, its habits and values ; scientific inquiry ; a mere taste for the marvellous ; and occasionally, rather pitifully, a genuine and overwhelming desire to get in touch with some loved person lost.

All this is mere preliminary, to explain how I came to be sitting in circle with three men so entirely different from me and from each other as Tarrant, Pybus, Mortimer ; and one woman so inexplicable as the medium, Mrs. Bain. Tarrant was one of those people that all the more showy religions cater for ; he liked marvels. The blood of St. Januarius liquefies for such as these, and bull-roarers whirl in African caves. Pybus was the earnest inquirer. He found spiritualism logical : it satisfied his intellect ; having swallowed the camel of survival after death he ceased to strain at the gnat-like tactics of the spirits, who in their endeavours to resume contact with the world moved birdcages, rang bells, and brought from other climes such mementos as safety pins and

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faded flowers. (Apports was the technical term for these. They were diverse, their one common characteristic was portability. The spirits never, in my experience, astonished us by materialising a grand piano in my dining-room where we sat behind locked doors.)

Then there was the medium. Mrs. Bain had good looks of a large sort, but it would have been difficult to imagine falling in love with her—for me, at least ; her natural voice, that most revealing attribute of man or woman, was tinny and self-assured, though it could put on a deeper note in the cabinet. Whether or no she was honest, she gave value for money. I believe the truth to be that she did possess certain powers which she eked out, poor creature, with safety pins and the like ; destroying credibility by the very means she adopted to bolster it up.

I repeat that, diverse as were all our needs, she gave us good value, Lance Mortimer in particular. He had been going to her for some time, even before his wife's death ; indeed, I believe it was Aileen, the wife, who induced him to attend this circle in the first place, and naturally after she died he gave it more of his time and interest than ever. Personally I was always a little sceptical about the messages Mrs. Bain obtained for him. She had known Aileen well, and the confection of detailed messages having the ring of truth seemed to me in the circumstances to be a little too easy. Possibly I wrong Mrs. Bain. At any rate Mortimer seemed happy and reassured by the messages, which was the chief thing. He never missed a meeting, and three months after his wife's death had lost almost completely the dragged and haunted look which came on him during her illness.

I have said that to me it was impossible to imagine falling in love with Mrs. Bain ; impossible that any man of education and intelligence should do so. She appeared to read nothing,

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to be interested in nothing ; she was big and badly dressed. I admit that at moments she was impressive, while the trance was on ; there was one occasion when she stripped off every rag of clothing in the cabinet and marched into the room stark, reciting something in a language none of us could follow, and making curious gestures—of libation, I imagine ; her empty hands curved themselves to the handles of an imponderable beaker. There was some discussion among the five of us afterwards—this was in Aileen's lifetime—as to whether we should tell her the details of her performance when she came to, but eventually we decided not to embarrass her. On this occasion she was quite unconscious of her actions ; the display was altogether too crude to have been the result of conscious deliberation ; nakedness, after first youth has passed, and in a heavy muscular woman, lacks allure. We repeated to her so much as we could remember of what she had spoken—there was a refrain, like the "Pray for us" of a litany, which we were able to write down—and left it at that. I believe, personally, that for once some very old wine was poured into a new bottle.

But this was the performer ; the woman was one who would terrify the average man, if he ever looked at her twice. And so I am quite unable to put into words my surprise when, strolling through Hyde Park one evening, in that unfrequented patch near the police station, I saw her sitting on the grass, with Mortimer beside her. She was unmistakable. It was summer, and she had taken the hat from her heavy black hair, which had never been cut, and was never tidy ; a coil of it had come down, and lay askew on her shoulder, while her dress, though it was of some light-coloured stuff, somehow looked frowsy. She had her back to me, but I could see Mortimer's face. It was the face you may see often enough in the Park of an evening, eyes intent, mouth restless,

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desire written plain on it for any passer-by to read. The sight sickened me, somehow. I had known gentle Aileen, his wife, rather well.

Mortimer was talking, urging something, looking steadily, as lovers do, at her mouth. She listened, not interrupting, but her right hand plucked at the grass, and when he seemed to have done she shook her head vigorously, so that the coil of hair slipped down further. When she answered, the timbre of her voice carried, though not the syllables ; she seemed to be denying or refusing something. Mortimer became more urgent. On that her restless hand seized the discarded hat, and crammed it on anyhow ; then, with an ugly, plunging movement like a cow, she got to her feet and, looking down on him, rapped out something final. Unexpectedly she turned my way, and met my eyes. A cloud of red came over her sallow face, but she walked towards me.

"Quite a surprise," said she, in those tinny accents of hers, shaking her head ; the coil of black hair tumbled forward over her shoulder. "I never !" said she, hastily stuffing it under the hat with her thick fingers. "What you must think of me——"

"Hello, Mortimer," I said, looking past her.

He had risen, and was coming towards the pair of us, seeming none too pleased at the interruption.

"We've been getting a breath of air," Mrs. Bain explained.

"Very wise," I said ; "it's hot."

Then there was nothing more to say. I raised my hat to her, and started to move on ; it was so very evident that Mortimer didn't want me. But as I took my first step Mrs. Bain fell in beside me, saying :

"I'm going your way, if you don't mind being seen with me."

I said something about my delight. She added, with what seemed deliberate intent :

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"Mr. Mortimer's had as much fresh air as he can stand. He ought to be getting home."

Mortimer said nothing whatever to either of us. He took off his hat and we walked on, leaving him standing on the path.

I had nothing in particular to say to Mrs. Bain, but I made some sort of conversation about the dresses and the grass. She answered absently and kept looking at me sideways. At last, just as we were halting to cross the Row, she suddenly spoke.

"I suppose you think there's something a bit funny going on."

I could not pretend to misunderstand, though I did not want her confidences.

"There's no reason, you know, why you shouldn't sit in the Park with Mortimer."

She answered, in tones that sounded just a little shocked;

"Well, but he's only been a widower three months."

"Widowers don't have to shut themselves away from the world nowadays."

"No," said she dubiously; "only a person ought to show respect."

"Aileen Mortimer was a very generous and sane woman," I went on, "as you know. You might have sat in the Park with her husband in her lifetime with her full consent. Why should it be different now?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," said she; "only it isn't like the same——"

"Shall we get across?" I asked her, for really I found it intolerable to discuss Aileen with her, and I did not want to be drawn into any comment on Mortimer.

She made no answer, and I hurried her across, through a gap in the traffic. She came meekly enough, head well down

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as is the way of women ; on the opposite, the Knightsbridge side, I stopped, meaning to leave her and walk down alone to Chelsea. To my horror and dismay she was crying. Her great eyes were welling, tears had overflowed, making channels through the brownish powder she used ; in another minute she would have broken into noisy sobbing there on the public path. I could hardly leave her boo-hooing after me like a punished dog and so took action at once ; gripped her elbow, and piloted her into a providential teashop that I had suddenly remembered—quiet, and no more than a hundred yards away. The place was nearly empty ; it was getting on for six ; shoppers were on their way home. Mrs. Bain gulped a “thank you” and disappeared without shame into the Ladies’ Room. I was curious, and sorry for her in a detached sort of fashion. It is so difficult to realise that ugly women must have their emotions too.

She came out, powder renewed in a muddy mass on her nose, and sat down by me at the table. Without studying the menu she asked for chocolate—chocolate at a quarter to six : and while the waitress went for it, talked.

“I ought to be ashamed of myself, Mr. Findlay ; I know that. Making a fool of myself in public”—“and of me, too,” I thought—“like a kid of ten. D’you know how old I am ? I’m forty-three.”

She looked it, certainly ; she had never taken care, and nature had not been kind at the start. I said nothing. She was in the mood when a woman sees through the usual masculine futilities in the way of placation. She went on :

“Forty-three. Makes you think, doesn’t it ? I’ve been earning my living for twenty-five years, and you can believe me when I say I’m sick of it.”

The chocolate came, hot enough to waft steam even on that summer afternoon. I poured out my tea and added lemon,

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while she sipped the boiling thick stuff with a spoon.

"You're interested in your work, though, surely?"

"Look," said she, pointing her spoon at me; "I'm interested, and it's as honest a way to make a living as most others. Only just—I'm sick of it."

She sipped more chocolate, and I could feel her waiting for me to make first move. No purpose was to be served by waiting, and I obliged her.

"Mortimer, I suppose, was suggesting an alternative."

"You're right, he was. And I refused. Refused dead, like that—" she made a slashing movement of her powerful hand—"and here I am, going on like a kid with a smashed toy."

The eyes had indeed started to well again. I said hastily;

"Mortimer didn't mean to offend you, I'm certain."

"Offend? Offend me? Oh, I suppose you think it was the other thing he wanted. It wasn't; it was marriage, flat out."

That did surprise me, and perhaps my face showed it.

"Oh, I know. Mrs. Mortimer's only been in her grave three months. You think it's not respectful. Nor do I, and so I told him. But it was hard work saying it. I suppose I'm what they call in love."

She said that as though it were some remote condition familiar perhaps to doctors, but her face contradicted her, or, rather, it underlined the words, gave them force and beauty, for all the clotted powder and the reddened eyes. I said, smothering my convictions, for I had no wish that she should marry Mortimer:

"Well, you know, there's really nothing against it. He's free."

She answered, staring into the cup, talking as if to herself: "If only I could be sure—"

“Sure?”

“It’s this way,” she said, and paused to gulp down the rest of the chocolate. “I want to have a home of my own. And I’m fond of him, I don’t deny. Fond—” she considered the word, and altered it. “I’m mad about him. But there’s things to be considered. For one thing, I’m not his class.”

There was no answer to that. It was pretty evident that they could have nothing in common, that there was not one chance in fifty of the marriage being a success.

“For another, I’m older than him. He’s thirty-eight—five years—that makes a lot of difference. And I couldn’t think of marrying him for a year; it wouldn’t be right. That brings me up to forty-four. So, you see, looked at all round, it’s silly. I see that as clear as you do. Only——”

I was sorry for her. This outburst was genuine, and in refusing Mortimer she had done the only possible thing; but the cost of the decision I could fairly estimate. After all, Mortimer made a fair amount of money, lived comfortably, had a position in the world. She was a vagabond, without a home or a future or any background save that which some psychic laboratory afforded. It was much to give up voluntarily, for the sake of common sense; I respected her, and told her so. She said, with a big, tremulous smile:

“Keep your bouquets a bit longer. I mayn’t stick to it.”

“I shan’t blame you,” I said, “if you don’t. What about the circle? You’d better not be seeing him.”

“No, that’s right,” she agreed with a sigh. “We’d better wash out the sittings for a while.”

“How long will it take to——”

Get over it, I meant, and though I left the actual words unsaid she answered them.

“I don’t feel as if I ever should, come to that. Better say I’m going away.”

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"I'll tell Mortimer."

"Well, I'd be obliged. I don't want to get in touch with him, you see."

"How about money?" I said on an impulse; "can you carry on?"

She looked vague, and said she could manage. We went together out of the shop, which was closing, and I saw her on to a bus before I walked thoughtfully home.

There was to have been a meeting next evening, but I sent out cards, with some invention about Mrs. Bain's having been called away suddenly, to put off the others. These cards should all have been delivered next morning, in plenty of time to warn; nevertheless, at nine-thirty that night, our usual hour, Mortimer was shown in.

"No sitting to-night, I'm afraid," I said. "Didn't you get my notice?"

"I got it, thanks," he answered; "that's why I'm here."

He looked sick and dangerous, and I could easily trace the cause even before he spoke again.

"What did you say to her yesterday? I want to know."

There was no sense in refusing to discuss the matter, since he already knew all that she had told me. I let him have the whole of our interview in the teashop, ending with:

"And she's right, you know. What she says is unanswerable. She's thinking for both of you. I respect her, and her decision, and so will you if you're wise."

"What do you know about it?" he broke out in fury; not rowdy fury, but a deadly white quiet. "What do you know of what's behind it all? You with your respect, you're half dead!" He used a curious phrase then. "I've earned that woman, and I'm going to have her."

"That's your affair. I won't help."

"I don't want your help. Where's she gone?"

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"I don't know."

This was true ; I was surprised that she should so soon have cut herself adrift. He considered me, whistling softly through his teeth.

"You're a liar, but it doesn't matter. I'll find out."

"If you love her, you'll let her alone."

"I can't let her alone," said Mortimer, snarling, and turning to the door.

He might never have found her but for one thing ; she had to live, and she knew only one way of earning money. If I had pressed a loan on her there in the tea-shop it might have prevented the whole tragedy—and yet, I don't know ; I couldn't have kept on subsidising her, and she must, sooner or later, have gone back to her trade. She went far enough off, but mediums are easy to keep track of, especially such a woman as she was, well known and nearly honest. Mortimer ran her to earth in Edinburgh within three months of her departure from London, and began without delay or haste to make his siege.

Poor woman ! She did resist as she had promised ; fled the town, tried to get passage to America, and was brought up short, like a dog on a chain, by the imperious eternal need of money. He followed again and found her in some sort of dingy lodgings, where he fairly bullied her into consenting. All this I had from her long afterwards, and I remember the words she used :

"They say if a man gets thirsty enough he'll drink sea-water though he knows it'll send him off his head. I'd got to that state. I knew it was mad, but I was thirsty for him."

It would have been superhuman to expect her to put up yet another fight. She had done her best for the decencies, and for the ultimate happiness of both of them ; he, and the

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world, and the circumstances of her life would have none of her best. She gave in.

Having yielded, she kept nothing back—no rashness, no absurdity of affection. She let herself go with his desire like a flower dropped on a quick stream; or, rather, since that comparison suggests something frail, like a whole tree swept towards Niagara. She would not marry him, so far she held out, until the year was past from the date of his wife's death, but she planned, doted, spent fifteen hours a day in his company, and with a snap of her big fingers gave her whole spiritualist connection the go-by.

She it was who wrote to me, for I believe that after those half-dozen sentences exchanged between us on the evening of her flight Mortimer would have seen me dead and damned before he put his foot over my door. She, on the other hand, remembered that I had understood both sides of the question. I wrote back congratulating, and suggesting that they should come one evening to dine. She accepted enthusiastically by telephone.

"Oh, please, Mr. Findlay," I heard her unlovely voice; "if it isn't a rude question, will anybody else be coming?"

"That's as you choose," I answered. "Plain party, or coloured; you shall decide."

"Oh, then, just us, if you don't mind, Mr. Findlay." She had that infuriating trick of using one's name at every sentence. "Unless—" the voice trailed off.

"Unless?" Then I suppose I must have caught her unspoken thought. "What about Pybus and Tarrant, if they're in London? A final meeting of the circle?"

"Oh, yes," said she, noisily glad; "that's what I was hoping you'd say. After all, it was with you all, and sitting for you, I met Lance. It would be nice to say sort of good-bye."

"You're giving up your work, I suppose?"

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"Lance says I've got to," she answered, and the clumsy words, as she spoke them in her unbearable voice, gave an impression of joyous surrender difficult to describe.

So'this was the party, four men, one woman, just as we had met often before. Pybus and Tarrant turned up first together, so that I was able to let them know the state of affairs. They were incredulous, as I had been when I came upon the ill-assorted couple in the Park.

"They say," said Tarrant, "a man always goes for the same type of woman. Here's proof he doesn't. You couldn't have two women less alike than the Bain and Aileen."

"Few husbands have energy enough to experiment in domesticity," I said, busy with the sherry. "If a man's happy with one type he'll stick to that."

Pybus, always literal, took up my words as he accepted his glass.

"Wasn't Mortimer happy, then, with Aileen?"

Tarrant jumped on him, of course. Aileen, so fine, such a darling, who wouldn't be happy with her? Pybus, making appreciative faces over his sherry, agreed that he had said something idiotic, and the topic dropped—dropped, and took root in my mind uncomfortably, like the barbed seed of some desert flower. They went back to the marvellous alliance.

"She's older than he is. And—how about Bain? Who and what was Bain?"

"He's dead, she told me once."

"Well, it's Mortimer's funeral I wouldn't care for a wife myself that had been long on this job." Spiritualism, Pybus implied.

"She's giving it up."

Tarrant laughed.

"How can she give it up?" Which was just what Mortimer had said to me, concerning his pursuit of her. "She's—a

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sort of spirit right-of-way. After there's been going and coming for years you can't suddenly padlock a gate that people have got used to using."

" You can," said Pybus, the literal. " It's entirely a question of how long the trespassing has been permitted."

" She's been working as a medium for twenty-five years," I said, and Pybus' face fell.

" What I mean is," Tarrant went on, " she won't be able to help stuff coming through. It's a queer situation. Suppose Aileen wanted to get in touch with Lance?"

" Talk of something else," I said; " they're on the stairs."

A moment later they were in the room. She came first, untidy as ever, but grander. Her hair was wound up in a large bun, lop-sided already, and secured with a flashing slide of some kind at the back. Her dress was a savage orange colour which must have killed any clothing set near it save masculine blacks and whites—a terrific dress, but her face dominated it. Big and untended and uncouth as she was, there was about her a happiness so shining that it lent her almost beauty ; as the two men congratulated, and she smiled with her eyes on Mortimer, I could read astonishment behind their civil masks. They were used to her as the medium, a powerful blank body, strong enough physically to stand the strain of the trances, having no very definite personality to oppose the entrance of the other-world forces, whatever they were. The instrument had become a woman, and though I was prepared for it, knowing the circumstances and having had that conversation in the tea-room, it was something of a revelation, even to me.

Mortimer, too, looked different, settled, as if at last he had come home. There had been hunger in that face when I last saw it snarling over his shoulder, and now that the hunger was appeased he was again the pleasant-mannered

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fellow that his club knew ; the snarling face became something seen in nightmare, and which for her sake I hoped he might never show again.

Yet, despite the perfect contentment of the chief guests, or possibly because of it, our meal was not successful. The talk was spasmodic, gusty ; it rose and died, and even the wine could not keep it to an even flow. The truth was, of course, that we were about the most ill-assorted party conceivable, having only one interest in common—a topic barred by the idiotic prejudice against talking shop. Somehow or other we laboured along, in friendly but difficult converse, to the moment of coffee, which at my suggestion we took at the table, all sitting together round the candles. It is a good moment, that after-dinner quarter hour's dawdle, wine circling, smoke ascending, and whether or no there is talk seems to matter little enough. I saw Mrs. Bain, as she stirred her coffee, gaze about her with kindness. We had always held our circle in the dining-room, which lies at the back of the house, insulated from noise, and she was evidently remembering. I put it to her.

“A penny, Mrs. Bain ?”

She came back to reality, looking a little puzzled.

“Penny ? Oh, I see what you mean—for my thoughts. I was thinking about all that had happened in this room. We got grand results, didn’t we ?”

Everybody nodded, and there was a murmur of “That we did. Thanks to you. Wonderful phenomena.”

She went on, looking steadily and lovingly at Mortimer : “I’m giving it up, you know, for good.”

“You won’t be able to,” said Tarrant, who, it must be remembered, was a believer born. “It will come over you sometimes, a rush of communication.”

Mortimer laughed rather shortly.

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"I'll keep her to earth," he said, and glanced over at her for response. But for once she was not looking at him. She was staring down into her coffee cup, where the round of shining black liquid seemed to hold her eyes. Tarrant was going on with his argument, using over again his simile of the right-of-way.

"There aren't so many short cuts," he persisted, "and those there are get known; both sides of the fence they get known. How many mediums are there—proved, honest ones, I mean—in London? And how many wanting to use them on the other side? Do you suppose they're going to sit back and let——"

"Look out," I said sharply.

Mrs. Bain's head had fallen forward, though her eyes still were open, staring into the dark pool of the cup. Mortimer swore, and thrust back his chair. He was sitting on my left, opposite her, and I shoved him back and down. It is not healthy for sleepwalkers to wake them in mid-progress, and the same holds good for people entranced. I had, I may say, from the first moment, no doubt whatever that this was a genuine performance. Her colour was deathly, the breathing had slackened, the pupils of her eyes were contracted as if she had taken a stiff shot of morphia. She had looked like that once before, on the occasion when she stripped, and I remembered these preliminary signs most clearly.

Mortimer subsided under my hand, but spoke to her.

"Ruby, come back. You're having dinner with Findlay, not giving a sitting. Ruby!"

She took no notice at all, she who all the evening had been quiveringly alive to every glance and gesture of his. She stared into the cup, opening her mouth now and then. It was Tarrant who said, triumph in his whisper:

"Better let her get it over. What about the lights?"

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"No!" said Mortimer loudly. "Ruby, listen to me."

"She doesn't hear you," Pybus told him unnecessarily; "something's coming through."

Tarrant got up quietly and, leaning over the table, blew out the candles, our only illuminants, one by one. We sat in the silence and dark, I with my hand still on Mortimer's arm, listening to strong sighs that came from her, seeming to shake her; great sighs, deep and endless, as though her whole trunk were hollow, a mere cavern for air. Then a voice sounded, broken and often half-lost, like some person speaking against the wind.

"Cruel," it said. "Oh, cruel! You hurt me so."

Nothing more for a minute. I took upon myself to be leader, since the others were silent.

"Who are you?" I asked. "Will you tell us who you are?"

"He knows," answered the voice; "Lance knows."

"Have you a message for Lance?"

A laugh; a pause; then a little husky sound of singing, an old song, familiar words, the folk-tune of "Lord Rendel."

"Oh, that was strong poison, Rendel my son;
Oh, that was strong poison, my pretty one—"

I felt the muscles contract in Mortimer's arm as involuntarily my fingers gripped tighter; we were both hearing the same thing, Aileen's light voice with a touch of County Kerry in it, singing an accustomed tune through the mouth of her supplanter. I remembered, troubled, that on this day a year ago she had died.

"Aileen," I said, "we know you now. What have you come to say?"

The voice fluttered on with its song.

"Oh, make my bed soon;
I'm sick to my heart, and fain would lie down."

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Still Mortimer did not speak, and I supposed that the shock of the thing was keeping him quiet. We all of us knew that voice and recognised it with the conviction that this was no trickery. Aileen spoke quite inimitably. This was herself.

"Lance, Lance," it went on. "What are you doing, my dear one? I'm sick, take that dope away. Must I have it, Lance? Ah, you've killed me, my poor creature, my dear lover; wasn't I dying fast enough—was that it? It's kind stuff you're using, gentle stuff, sleepy; but oh, the cruel pain at my heart! You wanted that big woman, did you? Poor Lance, and I was in the way, my sweet pretty one." Then the voice went wavering off into its tune again. "I'm sick to my heart, and fain—and fain—"

It went away in ghostly heavings and sighs, cavernous breaths on which now and then a note of the song could still be heard riding. There was a pause, a deadly five seconds. Then the arm under my hand flexed, Mortimer's fist drove at me in the dark and caught me over the heart; there was the screech of a chair on the parquet, and a shaft of light struck in upon us through a door torn open. In an instant a wave of noise seemed to rise; feet scuffling, the voices, angrily loud, of Tarrant and Pybus in the hall, a struggle in which a mirror went down, and through which I could hear the scrape of steel. Mortimer's blow had been fierce enough to sicken me. I sat limp, hearing the struggle, which at the height of its din suddenly died away to silence, following the sound of a man's fall.

"He's done it. My God," from Tarrant; "how do you stop blood?"

"You'll never stop that," Pybus speaking. "Better than the hangman's trap, anyway."

I got to my feet with a groan, and pitched forward to the door, to whose handle I clung, looking out. Mortimer had

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made a job of it with one of the Chinese swords hung for ornament on the wall, my yellow wall that was streaked where blood had spurted towards it from the side of his neck. He died while I watched, with a writhing of the face, a rictus above clenched teeth that I do not now care to recall. We stood away from him, and stared down on him dying, without compassion of any sort for the man who had murdered Aileen. Not one of us doubted that ; and if it may sound absurd wholly and instantly to believe a woman whom we knew to be not above using the tricks of her trade—well, we had seen the glow of her happiness before that voice came out of nowhere, singing and murmuring damnation to her hope. We looked down on him, and then round at each other, silently with a question. What to do ?

Before there could be any consultation, a sound from the dining-room made me start and turn ; that most ordinary of sounds, a long, untrammelled yawn. I went in at once, shutting the door behind me, and switched on the lights. Mrs. Bain was lying back in her chair, very white but conscious, and rubbing at her eyes with the heel of her hand like a child.

"Where's Lance ?" she asked first, smiling. "And the others ? You look washed out, Mr. Findlay. Whatever have I been up to ?"

"Something came through," I began, stammering, for there were sounds outside as if they might be lifting him ; "something rather shocking——"

She glanced down at once at her ornate and hideous dress, but it was not disarranged, she was clad as fully as its cut permitted.

"Fancy !" she said archly. "It must have been bad for you to look like that. I'm tired too ; dead tired. But what's the odds, so long as you're happy ? We always did get good results, didn't we, in this circle ?"

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Quinette's crime¹

[Continued from our December Issue]

THE man stopped. "Wait a moment," he said. They had come along the rue de Rambuteau and had reached the corner of the rue Beaubourg. The man looked in all directions, but especially behind them.

When he had made sure that nobody was coming after them, he followed the rue Brisemiche and then turned immediately into the rue Taillepain, which at that period was still in existence.

The street, barely three yards wide, formed a right angle. A hanging lamp shed a half-light on the fronts of the very old houses ; but their doorways were left quite in the dark.

The man swung so abruptly into a passage that his companion did not realise the fact for a moment and had to go back on his tracks.

The passage, which was only wide enough for one person, was dark ; but a little light trickled into it through an oval opening set in a recess to the left.

They crossed a little courtyard and found in front of them another passage, very short, in which there were only two doors—one at the end, and one to the left.

¹From *Men of Good Will* by Jules Romains. Translated from the French by Warre B. Wells. (Lovat Dickson, Large Crown 8vo. 8s. 6d. net.)

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The man opened the door on the left, put his parcel on the floor, and drew the curtains. Then he lit a little oil-lamp. The inside of the room was less squalid than one might have expected. There were a wooden bed, about three feet wide, with sheets that looked clean; two tables, one of which bore a basin and a water-pitcher; a jug on the floor; on the other table, a fringed cloth; and two chairs. The tiled floor was partly covered by matting.

They sat down.

“I’m trusting you, you see.”

“But—this isn’t your hotel?”

“No, of course it isn’t.”

“Then what is it—your hiding-place?”

“Yes. . . . You can talk quite freely. The room next door is empty.”

“You’re going to sleep here?”

“Yes.”

“To-night?”

“Yes.”

Quinette looked around him.

“But—surely this is somebody’s private house?”

“Yes, a good woman’s.”

“Nothing to do with the one you were telling me about just now . . . the lady of last night?”

“No, nothing whatever. . . . You make me laugh.”

“What put it into your head to come here?”

“I don’t know. I may as well tell you that I’ve known this neighbourhood for a long time.”

“Wasn’t your good woman surprised to see you without any baggage, even a hand-bag?”

“I had the package . . .”

“So it did come in useful, you see.”

“Besides, I had another package as well.”

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Quinette looked for the other parcel out of the corner of his eye. At the moment he could not see it.

"I paid her a week's rent in advance. So you may imagine that she didn't raise any objections."

"Didn't she question you?"

"She's half deaf. I took advantage of that to say something or other to her. When people are like that, they talk just for the sake of hearing somebody talking to them. But they're used to not understanding what you are saying. They don't mind about that."

"But what about your trunk that you left at the hotel?"

"I don't know that I care much about what's in it."

"Perhaps not, but it will give you away. The hotel-keeper might make a statement to the police. And it wouldn't take a great deal—"

"I know. . . . Now that you mention it, there's a matter about which you could do me a service."

"By going and getting your trunk, you mean?"

"Of course I should give you the money to pay what I owe them. Last week, and Sunday, Monday, Tuesday—say, three or at the most four days over."

"But it might be a serious matter for me."

"I'll tell you what would be a good thing; you say that you are my new boss; that I had asked you to pick up my trunk, as you happened to be in the neighbourhood, and that you wanted to inquire about me at the same time. You look just like an employer. You do, really. You look thoroughly respectable. It wouldn't enter their heads that you were anything else. Besides, you know, business people, so long as they get their money—well, they don't worry very much about you."

"Yes, but there might be enquiries afterwards. . . ."

"And what if there were? They would say that a real

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gentleman, with a fine beard, came to tell them that he had given me a job. What's the matter with that for an alibi?"

"But the hotel-keeper might ask me for your address, on the ground that he wanted to forward your letters."

"I never get any."

"That may be; but they might ask for it just out of curiosity; and I don't want to look like trying to hide it from them."

"Give a false address."

"Yes, and then, if there ever are enquiries, my visit to the hotel ceases to be an alibi for you. On the contrary, you strengthen suspicion. I'm speaking in your own interest when I say this."

Quinette fell silent. He looked around him. He listened. He was of an entirely novel sense of watchfulness. Nothing had yet blunted its sharpness, and the circumstances in which he found himself made it as responsive as it was intense. He tried to assess the value of the place as a refuge, the strength of the secrecy with which it surrounded a man, what degree of danger, what pressure of investigation it would resist.

You could hear occasional sounds of traffic, fairly far away; passing footsteps, in the street itself, very much deadened; sometimes the sound of a voice, which always sounded too close to be comfortable, like a hue and cry coming nearer. The footsteps sounded much more reassuring than the voices. But there were also periods of silence. The house itself seemed mute. The very slight, irregular noises which you could hear from time to time—rustlings, creakings, tappings—might come from an upper floor, but they might equally come from the neighbouring houses. All this region of old walls was so densely popu-

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lated that noises of this kind might wander about it at random and cease to belong to any one place more than to another, just like the odour of poverty and mildew which the walls sweated everywhere.

Quinette went on :

" I can see, of course, what you liked about this place. ' Who would ever think of looking for me here ? ' That's what you said to yourself. Unfortunately, the same idea would come into anybody else's head. It's just as though there were a notice at the entrance to the street through which you took me just now : ' Reserved for people in hiding. ' "

" Oh ! but all the same——"

" Besides, places like this are full of prostitutes and bullies. The police always have their eye on them. They have all kinds of informers in them. Your landlady—well, I wouldn't mind betting that she is one."

" You wouldn't say that if you saw her. Shall I invent some pretext for calling her and let you have a look at her ? "

" No, no ! She mustn't have a chance of recognising me. Not at any price. Whereabouts was your hotel ? "

" In the rue du Château, in the fourteenth district. Do you know it—a street that runs from the avenue du Maine, just beside the church, to the boulevard de Vaugirard, past the Ouest goods station ? "

" Not so far from my place, in short."

" About twenty minutes on foot."

" Not a neighbourhood you can be sure about either. But still, it's better than this one. Mind you, you did right to leave it ; but we shall have to find you something better."

" Oh, you're getting on my nerves ! "

" I'm still thinking about your trunk. There's one thing we might do—go and pay them to-day and tell them that

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you will come back for the trunk or send for it. There's nothing suspicious in the trunk if it were opened, is there—nothing that might interest the police or put them on the scent?"

" . . . No . . . except a number of pairs of brand-new socks, at the bottom. If they found those, they might wonder how I got them. But they wouldn't start looking for me just for that, would they?"

"No, I don't think so—if that's really all there is. So far as that goes you might have been setting up as a street sock-seller, at a stall, or with a barrow. When no complaint has been made, you know, the police don't go out of their way to be officious. But the first thing to do is pay these hotel people. After that they won't have anything to think about. They'll just shove the trunk in a corner and forget all about it until you send for it."

"Mind you, I never said that I didn't want the things in it."

"You can get on without them."

"But what advantage do you see in not getting it to-day?"

"This, in the first place—that they will have less reason for asking for your address. Even if you went yourself——"

"What, go myself? Not likely!"

"After all, why shouldn't you? . . . You could say: 'I'm only staying where I am for a night or two. I'll give you my definite address when I get the trunk.' Supposing it's somebody else—myself, for example—who goes, it's even simpler. I am your new employer—that's a good idea of yours. I've come to pay what you owe them—an advance on your wages. More especially, I've come to get a reference about you. Your new address? I don't know it yet. So long as I don't take your trunk away with me, there is no

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reason why I should give my own address ; and I am not bound to know whether you have found a place to live yet."

The man listened to Quinette as a patient listens to a doctor. All he wanted was to believe what he told him and do what he told him. When a patient raises an objection, it is only for the purpose of compelling the doctor to take everything into account and apply his infallible wisdom to all the details of the problem.

Quinette looked at his watch.

" Hallo, nearly seven o'clock !—and we haven't got very far."

He stood up.

" I should very much like to see if there isn't anything in the late evening papers, too."

" No, no ! " exclaimed the man excitedly ; " no ! "

" Why not ? Don't be ridiculous."

" Time enough to-morrow morning. I'll look myself then. But I don't want to know now. They're not going to find me here to-night, are they ? Very well, then. I want to be left in peace until morning. I want to sleep."

The book binder scarcely listened to him. He was thinking aloud.

" Seven o'clock . . . yes . . . wait a minute . . . wait a minute. . . . I'm not sure whether I haven't found the right solution. . . . I go out first. Yes, that's it. I improve the occasion by seeing how things look around here and whom one meets. I buy a paper—yes, I will ; you're not a child. You meet me—let's say at the Place de l'Hotel-de-Ville on the raised part in the middle. I'll be walking up and down reading. That's much less suspicious than a street-corner ; and, besides, there's more room. Then we'll take the Porte d'Orléans tram-car. We'll get out at the Montrouge church. You know that café there, at the corner

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of the rue d'Alésia and the avenue, on the left as you go towards the gate ?

“ Yes.”

“ Are you known there ? ”

“ I've never been inside the place.”

“ There's no risk of your meeting anybody you know there ? ”

“ No—not in that part of the avenue.”

“ Wait for me there. I'll go to your hotel. I'll pretend to be making inquiries about you—nothing more. You left yesterday afternoon ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ I can say to them : ‘ He came along yesterday. He went to work for me this morning.’ Perhaps that isn't a cast-iron alibi ; but still, it will put it into those people's heads that you can't have been doing anything very much out of the way last night ; and if they are questioned later on, they will still have the remains of that idea in their heads, and they will be inclined to add to it on their own account. The more so inasmuch as I shall give them to understand that my business is in the suburbs—the northern suburbs, let's say. You can see why I choose that direction, and I choose also a very large, very populous district, in case they should go looking for the bearded boss. At the same time, I shall be able to tell at once from the way they answer me whether there has been any alarm already——”

“ How can you tell ? ”

“ Of course I can. Let's suppose the worst : that they are on your track, that inquiries are being made, that the police have already called on your hotel people. I shall guess it at once from something they let drop, some reference they make, the mere looks of them. I shall not press the point, you may be sure. You will see me coming back in

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a hurry, and then we must consider what to do. It will have been a useful reconnoitring expedition.

"If, on the other hand, they merely say, rather bad-temperedly: 'Glad to hear he's got a good job. Hope he'll remember to pay us,' I shall reply: 'As a matter of fact, he intends to call this evening to settle with you and get his trunk,' and go you will, a quarter of an hour later. We shall be finished with the whole business at once."

"But they will question me."

"You can reply as vaguely as you like; for example: 'It's Saint-Denis way,' or simply: 'In the north of Paris.' You needn't say anything more. Or you might say this, which would be better still: 'I'm not sure whether I shall be staying there. As soon as I'm settled somewhere, I'll write to you.'

"What are we going to do with the trunk?"

"The simplest thing will be to take a taxi."

"But where am I to tell him to go? Here?"

"Let me see. The essential thing is to split up the distance. In the first place, is there anything in your trunk that you don't want me to see?"

"... No. . . . I've explained to you about the socks."

"Because, in that case—listen to me. Tell your taxi-driver to take you to the Montparnasse station, which is quite close. Leave your trunk there. You can give me the receipt. To-morrow morning I'll go and get the trunk out. I'll take it to my own place. If you want anything out of it, you can give me the key, and I will bring it to you. When we have found a safer hiding-place than this for you, it will be time enough to take your trunk there. In that way it will have made one trip less, and I defy anybody to trace its itinerary afterwards. Come on. We're wasting time. . . .

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“ Shall I take my parcel with me ? ”

The other hesitated. Then he made a helpless little gesture with his hands and burst out :

“ Listen. I’ll have to tell you something. I’ve played you a dirty trick. Yes, I have—after all you’ve done for me. It’s true, of course, that I felt I couldn’t be sure of you. As a matter of fact, I suspected you. But all the same . . . ”

Now that he was looking at the parcel more closely, Quinette noticed that it had changed its shape since morning. It was bigger. There were bulges in the paper. The string had lost its symmetry.

“ You’ve opened it ? . . . You’ve put something else into it ? ”

The man maintained his pitiable look of contrition. Quinette put the parcel on the chair where he had been sitting and untied it.

“ What will you think of me ? ”

Quinette opened the parcel. On top of the books was a folded jacket—the one the man had been wearing that morning—and when he unfolded it, he found the blood-stained handkerchief inside.

Quinette said nothing for a moment. He bit his lip and gazed at the other contemplatively out of his little, deep-set black eyes. Then he asked :

“ Why did you do that ? ”

“ I don’t know. I swear to you I don’t know.”

“ You were going to give the parcel back to me. What did you hope would happen afterwards ? ”

“ It was just a nasty trick—a bad joke, you might call it.”

“ You wanted your revenge on me, did you ? ”

“ No. At least, I was certainly pretty furious about your forcing me to see you again ; but I didn’t want to do you

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any harm. No, it wasn't that. I was thinking what a face you would make when you opened the parcel."

"I see."

The bookbinder reflected, stroking his beard.

"I meant to tell you right away," the man went on.

"I was sorry. But I didn't dare."

"I see . . . Well . . ."

Quinette sighed. Then he said :

"It doesn't seem to have done you much good, anyway.
What are you going to do with these things ?"

"I'm going to throw the handkerchief down a sewer,
as you told me to."

"And the jacket?"

The man shrugged his shoulders.

"You had better leave it there," said Quinette. "We can see about it afterwards, with the rest of your clothes. You haven't any very noticeable stains on your trousers, have you? It will be bright in the tram-car, and in the cafe where you are going to wait for me."

* * *

He took up the little oil-lamp, inspected the man carefully, and put it down again.

"I don't see anything very suspicious. We can make a start. I'll go first."

He was no sooner in the passage than he realised that the other, for fear lest Quinette should take revenge on him, might not dare to meet him in the Place de l'Hotel-de-Ville. He might lose his head altogether and take flight at random. If he got himself arrested, Quinette would certainly be compromised. He went back again.

"In the square, remember? In five minutes at the most. . . . Don't trust me, do you? But happily I'm not so bad as you are."

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" You're not going to give me away, to punish me ? "

" I dislike them too much. If I wanted to punish you, I should do it myself. But I'm sure there won't be any second time."

The other looked at him with the anxious obedience of a grudgingly pardoned dog.

* * *

Juliette reached the bookbinder's shop without having had occasion to shake herself out of that drowse of pain in which, during the two months that it has tossed and turned in it, her mind had finally found a comfortable position.

After a moment's hesitation she grasped the door-handle. But the door resisted her. The shop was shut. Juliette was surprised. She stepped back a little on the pavement and looked at the front of the shop.

Ah, the door was opening slightly. The face of the bearded bookbinder appeared, at first looking furtive and suspicious. Then he recognised her. His face cleared, and he smiled.

" Excuse me, madame. I was just putting things straight. I had bolted the door."

He led the way into the shop, picked up a newspaper which was spread open on the big table, went behind the table himself, and stood with his back to her for a few moments, pretending to search on his shelves and then in the little glass-fronted bookcase. He muttered :

" Your book . . . your book. . . . But . . . "

He turned round. He had recovered his presence of mind.

" But—when did I promise it you, madame ? "

" For to-day . . . "

" For this morning ? "

" I think so."

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"Well, even if you had not come until this evening, it would still not have been finished. I'm not in the habit of breaking my word. But I have unfortunately been interrupted. I am very sorry."

"I don't see my book anywhere," thought Juliette. "It isn't here at all. What has he done with it?" She would have liked to question the bookbinder, but did not want to offend him. He went on :

"This is Monday. I shall try to finish it by the day after to-morrow, in the morning. If you would leave me your address, I will have it sent to you, and that will save you the trouble of coming again."

Juliette was confused.

"The fact is—I wanted to have it now. I would almost rather you gave it back to me."

"But, madame," replied Quinette quietly, "I presume it is the book with its binding that you want? None of my colleagues—not one of them—could bind it for you before Wednesday. Besides, the work is already begun."

"Nothing has happened to the book, has it?"

"Of course not, madame. I would show it to you to satisfy you; but it is at this moment in a special press, and it ought not to be touched until the glue has set."

"Very well, monsieur. It doesn't matter. I shall come back on Wednesday morning; or I shall send somebody.
Au revoir, monsieur."

Once he was alone again, Quinette addressed confused reproaches to himself. It was not that he was particularly dissatisfied with himself. It had been a good idea of his to go and open the door, after he had first decided that he would not stir. He had pulled himself together at once, and, so far as he could tell, he had not, even at the

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beginning, betrayed any very suspicious sense of disturbance.

But all this was not very much. He should have done something better than that. What? He was not sure. His common sense certainly told him that, in circumstances such as those in which he found himself, the only thing that mattered was to dispose of the immediate danger, the one that was already right on top of him. Any disposition to complicate the situation still further, to add the risks of any new adventure, whatever it might be, to the risks he was already running, would be next door to madness.

But still he caught a glimpse of a whole system of life, whose fundamental rule would be never to shirk any enterprise, so long as it was theoretically possible, once chance put the bait of it in your way. This line of conduct corresponded with a general outlook on life, with a myth of the "strong man," which Quinette could not quite succeed in attaining, towards which he could only grope through a kind of mental mist, as shining as it was shifting.

Out of all these fugitive intuitions he isolated a few more precise ideas : in the first place this one—that, in the normal course of life, which you accept by sheer force of habit, you spend your time in preventing yourself from going on with activities which have already begun ; that you do so without any sound reason, out of mere cowardice, or distrust of yourself ; and that, in doing so, you keep on committing a kind of laying waste of yourself, just like a man walking in his garden and cutting off everything that raises its head, every shoot that is most sure of growing.

A woman comes to see you for the second time. She is young and beautiful. It is not necessary to have any plan, any objective, laid down beforehand. But it is not permissible to let her go away again without doing anything to advance towards some objective. If you try to make

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excuses for yourself, by saying, for example, that you are up to the neck in a murder affair which the papers report this morning, and that you need all the presence of mind, all the resourcefulness of mind, you possess to stop the police knocking at your door within the next few hours, or within the next hour, and asking you what a certain trunk hidden in your back shop is doing there—then you are merely confessing that you are lacking in breadth of view.

Quinette found a comparison which helped him to see what he was driving at more clearly. There are some shopkeepers who are afraid of being overwhelmed with orders. There are others, on the contrary, who make it a matter of principle never to refuse an order, no matter what happens. They will do the best they can. Everybody will be satisfied, sooner or later. These people display a kind of commercial heroism. Quinette, who was a shopkeeper in his spare time, did not set much store upon heroism of this sort so far as his own business was concerned. But what he had in his head was a transposition of it on to a more elevated plane.

At this moment he remembered his Herculex belt. He smiled, with a kind of ambiguous indulgence which applied both to the Herculex belt and to himself. He was conscious this morning of a state of intellectual healthiness which justified him in being tolerant, just as a strong government can afford to be. It did not cost him anything to bestow upon this apparatus, which had by now become familiar to him, a trust with a tinge of irony about it. He had no need of that full-bodied certitude such as you require when doubt or distress of mind is preying upon you. If the belt had something to do with the vitality which he felt within him, so much the better. If it had nothing to do with it, why worry about it? It played its part as a fetish just as well as anything else.

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In certain cases to know the truth quite definitely is the essentially important thing. The very smallest risk of being mistaken must be drastically eliminated. Otherwise you are a fool or a trifler, and events will make it their business to punish you. But in other cases illusion does not matter. It may even amuse you, keep you company, help you along like a glass of wine or cigarette.

All these thoughts of his had not lasted three minutes. The bookbinder shot the bolt of the door again and returned to his back shop. The sense of excitement which possessed him, and which for the moment had assumed the form of an exuberance of bold ideas, was the legacy of the very keen emotion that he had felt this morning.

He had gone out, a little before eight o'clock, to make his usual small purchases. He had bought a paper. While he was still in the street, he had satisfied himself with running over it, anxious, as he was every morning, to see whether the still hidden "deed" had cropped up among the news. He had missed the report—how, he still could not understand.

Besides, as one morning followed another, the belief, unreasonable as it might be, had begun to establish itself in his mind that things were going to remain where they stood. It was as though the hidden deed refused to come out, as though it was burrowing into the past with a quite natural downward movement towards oblivion. "There are many crimes which are never found out; and more than one imagines." This thought had, perhaps, turned him aside from finding the news he was looking for at the first glance.

When he got back to his shop, he resumed his ransacking of the paper at his leisure. Suddenly the headline leapt to his eyes: "Murdered a week ago." He read the report—read it greedily, and with a kind of arid trembling, which kept on

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getting worse. His first reaction was to go and shoot the bolt of the street door. He held on hard to the corner of his table. He sat down again. Over and over again he repeated, in a low voice :

“ Ah, so that’s it ! So that’s it ! ”

Almost immediately he thought of the trunk, which he had put in a corner of the back shop, behind a cretonne curtain. Suddenly he had an irrational desire to take to flight, without any preparation—just put on his hat and go, anywhere.

At the end of five minutes his mind started functioning again. He read the report over once more, isolating the meaning of every sentence, doing his utmost to assimilate it. Crowding thoughts accompanied, or shot across, or interrupted his reading of it.

“ 18 rue DailLOUD. My own street. Only a couple of yards away. Almost at my very door. Extraordinary. I don’t remember that hovel. I didn’t know it existed. On a big courtyard. . . . What courtyard ? ”

He was a bad observer. He knew he was. But he did not like admitting it to himself. When he walked along the street, he was always preoccupied, absorbed in his own affairs. Especially in this neighbourhood which he thought he knew. His eyes, piercing though they were, were effective for the purpose of seeing things only when he deliberately concentrated their gaze upon something in particular.

“ A woman. I felt instinctively from the start that it was a woman. But I saw her as older. Dead for a week. That’s wrong. Only six days. A blunt instrument and a knife. Motive of the crime—theft.”

In substance the picture which he had conjured up of what had happened, from the very first day, was one of remarkable exactitude.

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"A bad observer perhaps," he said to himself. "For that matter, with a little training, that's something you can correct. But first-class in anything that has to do with mental construction—or reconstruction."

This flattering reflection was suddenly brushed aside by another, which was a bitter one. He, who had saved this man, at least for the time being, had not succeeded, in the course of six days of daily interviews, in making him confess the equivalent of what all Paris could learn from the papers this morning. It was true that Quinette had not pressed him. On the contrary. He had preferred to surround him with his influence, to accustom him, little by little, to a state of submission to him in everything. To drag a man's secret out of him is merely taking possession of one detail of that man. What the bookbinder wanted to do was to lay hands on the whole of the man. His secrets would come afterwards, of themselves. Quinette had ended by believing that he had time enough. The secrets were beginning to come. But they might have come sooner.

What information had the other surrendered to him? His name: Augustin Leheudry. His age: thirty-one. Stories about his childhood, his profession, his hard luck, his pilferings. His states of mind. An astonishing profusion of states of mind. Leheudry was by nature a fretful soul. He brooded over his troubles. He not only suffered from them; he had a positive passion for them.

If he had killed—on this point he had made no definite confession to Quinette; but in the course of his conversation the thing had gradually become clear—if he had killed, it was only at the last moment, when his victim tried to stop him, to deprive him of his "booty," as the paper called it. He had thought himself lost and, above all, robbed in his turn. He had seen no way out except murder.

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This act of self-defence, crazy though it was, might have something to be said for it. The plea, for that matter, was commonplace. But Quinette was persuaded that Leheudry had done nothing to avoid it, that he had seized the opportunity with a kind of feeling of satisfaction, and that the sight of blood had not been unpleasant to him. Sheer perversity, in short. Though he had, perhaps, no particular horror of perversity and cruelty, Quinette was conscious that he did not like them. In any case, he did not understand them.

Quinette realised that in connection with the "deed" he was now freely using the words "crime," "murder," "murderer." It was because, since this morning, all this was authorised.

"How could I have been such a fool as to say to myself that there were crimes like this which were never found out? Sluggishness of thought. Confusion of categories. A poisoning may remain concealed. So, conceivably, may a murder committed inside a family, which the complicity of members of it masks as accident or suicide. But the ordinary crime, committed by an outsider, is bound to come to light. This crime was bound to be discovered. My common sense ought to have told me so."

In short, an event of this kind might remain, for a longer or shorter time, in a first zone : that of unknown crimes ; but it passed sooner or later into a second : that of known crimes, with unknown criminals. What had happened overnight was the transition from one zone to the other : from the unknown crime to the unknown criminal.

But what about the third zone ? That of the known criminal ? Was not that transition, too, equally inevitable ?

This idea suddenly set Quinette's temples throbbing. It presented itself to him with all the prestige of simplicity and symmetry.

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The kind of fright which Quinette experienced—a sense of anticipated damnation, the inevitable approach of coming misfortune—was out of all proportion to the risks which he was running in the case in question. It almost made him forget the Leheudry affair itself. It was as though the law, whose apparent presence had laid its hand on his shoulder, had brought a much wider source of anxiety to life within him.

But all at once the idea lost its strength. The sense of paralysis vanished.

“Come, come! That won’t hold water. There are hundreds, thousands of examples of criminals who are never found out, in crimes just like this. ‘Unsolved crimes.’ It’s a matter of common knowledge.”

He smiled at himself. Little by little his enthusiasm came back to him. He struck the sheet of the open newspaper with the flat of his hand. He stood up from his chair. He felt like making a move, doing something. He was spoiling for a fight. As a matter of fact, since last night a fight was on. The police had taken the offensive. It was not for him to remain idle.

Two points strongly attracted him: the hovel, Leheudry. He wanted to run to the hovel, and he wanted to run to Leheudry. Where should he make a beginning? The hovel was quite close: the “scene of the crime.” It was a well-known fact that a criminal was irresistibly drawn to the “scene of the crime.” Quinette had not committed the crime. But was not this desire which he felt associated with that preposterous attraction which the criminal felt, and which so often led to his ruin? He must resist it. He must do nothing which was not dictated by the light of reason and did not form part of a methodical plan.

If only Leheudry himself had not already returned to the

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hovel ! Quinette had made him swear not to stir from the neighbourhood of his refuge. But the man was impulsive, and he was a liar. If he had read the paper this morning, would he have had the strength of mind to resist going to the "scene of the crime," the discovered crime ? The only hope was that he had not read the paper. And that was more likely. The printer stayed in bed late, slept as much as possible and had a terror of papers. At this time of day almost certainly he was not up yet.

Would it not be a good thing to go and see him at once—go as fast as possible, say in a taxi, to make sure of catching him ? Put him on his guard. Make him realise that henceforth the smallest slip might mean prison and death. That he must obey implicitly.

Yes, that was the thing to do. Quinette put on his hat.

Just as he was pulling back the bolt, the thought struck him : "And what about the trunk ?" Could he go off like that ? Would it not be extremely rash ? Suppose that the inquiry had made astonishingly rapid progress, and that at any moment, while Quinette was out, the police came and explored that trunk, found what was inside it ?

Quinette did not know yet what story he was going to tell to explain the trunk's presence in his back shop. But, before anything else, he must make sure that it contained nothing compromising. He had opened it only once, three days ago, to take some clean linen to Leheudry. He had looked inside it, but summarily—like a customs officer, not like a policeman. The story he told, whatever its details might be, would have no chance of being believed unless the trunk contained nothing which could be associated with the crime, nothing which even an investigator most inclined to jump to far-fetched conclusions could possibly regard as incriminating evidence or as an object stolen from the hovel. Any

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way, even if they did not believe him, Quinette would thus escape the charge of being a receiver.

So it was imperative to make a minute, searching investigation of that trunk. (With the same rigid methodicalness as last Tuesday, when he had applied himself to the task of making the kitchen clean of any trace of blood, in the scientific sense of the word "trace.") Any suspicious object, anything that lent itself to equivocal interpretation, must be burned.

(*To be continued*)

Our Contributors

HANS FALLADA was born in 1893 in Pomerania and spent his boyhood in Berlin and Leipzig, where his father practised as a lawyer. His interests, however, inherited perhaps from his Frisian and Hanoverian ancestors, always lay in the country, and so instead of taking his degree he became at the age of twenty an agricultural student in Thuringia. Failing to live up to the expectation of his employers as a slave-driver, Fallada returned to city life and there followed several years of hand-to-mouth existence, during which he turned to writing. His novel, published last year in this country under the title, *Little Man, What Now*, brought immediate success and enabled him to buy a small farm in Pomerania, where he now works the farm by day and devotes his evenings to writing.

ELLEN BURGESS is the daughter of a Colonel in the Royal Engineers, and as a child lived in Bermuda, Jamaica, and other remoter parts of the world. When she married, she went with her husband to Ceylon, Singapore, and Malacca. Her life of travel has influenced her writing, and has provided the background for many of her stories. A novel by Mrs. Burgess, *Miss Hawkins, the Mean Boarder*, was published last autumn.

WALTER DE LA MARE the most profoundly romantic of England's living poets, first won an assured place among the great writers of prose in 1921 by his authorship of the *Memoirs of a Midget*, which remain his only long work of fiction. While there has been no sequel to that volume in its own kind, Mr. de la Mare has in the last twelve years given us many memorable short stories. Some of these are deeply tragic and some (like the one published in this Magazine) are light-hearted : all of them are imaginative, the outcome of an intensely personal vision. His world is his own ; and whether he writes simply (as in his latest book *The Lord Fish*) or elaborately (as in *The Connoisseur*) his words, like those of every great stylist, have the trick of meaning far more than they say : in prose, no less than in verse, he is a master of symbol, of all the arts of implication.

His lectures, which include some detached and fascinatingly original studies of the technique of letters, have the same exquisite finish as his printed work.

MARIAN BOWER has travelled widely, but is best known as the interpreter of her own country of East Anglia. Among her novels are *Gotobedde Lane*, *The Quince Bush*, *Glory Place* and *Swan's Battle*, the last of which was published a year ago. She is also part author of the play *The Chinese Puzzle*. Her short stories in *East Anglian Neighbours* show her to be a master of the craft of the short story.

ARTHUR GRANT MORRIS was born in London in 1899 to a barrister father and an American mother. He wanted to learn the violin when he was four years old, but it was not until the age of six that he was allowed to have a fiddle. Music has always been the background of his life. He was educated at Westminster School. At the age of eighteen he obtained a Commission with the Royal Warwickshire Regiment, and served for a few months in France. He was invalided home with typhoid shortly before the Armistice. In 1919 he went up to Trinity College, Cambridge, but although he managed to take a degree in history his academic career was severely interrupted by musical activities. He was ordained in 1923, and worked first in the diocese of Southwell, and then in London. In 1931 he accepted a living in the most beautiful part of West Somerset, where he lives in a Georgian Rectory, and ministers to his flock who include a wife and two sons.

AIDAN REARDEN CONNER was born in Dublin in 1905. He was educated in Dublin and Cork, and on the streets of London. He began life with the intention of becoming a surgeon, but the Irish "trouble" upset his plans. He has been in turn a clerk, canvasser, London "down-and-out," navvy, salesman, furniture porter, and landscape-gardener. His interests besides writing are, he says, gardening and rockery construction.

HELEN ASHTON is the daughter of one barrister and the wife of another and has lived all her life in London. She is a qualified doctor and has introduced her medical experiences into several of her novels, which usually deal with modern life in a domestic setting. Perhaps the most successful has been *Doctor Serocold*, which was a Book-of-the-Month Club choice in America and has been translated into several European languages. It dealt with one day in the life of a country doctor in whose mind is reflected the history of his patients and his town. Her contribution to the present issue is another page from Luke Serocold's day-book. Other novels are *Belinda Grove*, the story of a house, *Bricks and Mortar*, a novel about architecture, and *Mackerel Sky*, a study of modern marriage under difficulties.

GUY DENT, born in 1892, commenced authorship at the age of eight. Educated at Malvern and Sandhurst, he abandoned the Army for adventure. During three years, with a minimum of money and a maximum of hardship he roamed Africa, Canada and Europe. A pilot during the war, upon its conclusion he returned to literature. During intervals between adventurous travel he has published about 100 stories here and in the States. Some years ago he decided against the more popular type of story. Since then his contributions have been accepted by, amongst other critical publications, the *Criterion* and the annual volume of *Best English Short Stories*. His only novel, *Emperor of the If*, was critically welcomed as of outstanding merit. He lives at Cambridge.

HELEN SIMPSON, an Australian living in London, is best known as a novelist, author of *Boomerang*, and *The Woman on the Beast*, the latter a Book Society choice last autumn. She has collaborated with Clemence Dane in writing detective stories, has contributed to Peter Davies' series of biographies, and was the translator, editor and annotator of *The Waiting City*, published early last year. Her work is distinguished by a quality of ironic humour which she has made peculiarly her own, and a wealth of erudition that becomes a part of the narrative instead of a decoration for it. Her interests range from Tudor history to present-day cookery. She is thirty-six years old.

JULES ROMAINS is the author of *Men of Good Will*, which appeared in English last autumn. In it he introduces numerous characters, coming from all walks of life to throng his pages, and from every quarter of pre-war Paris, among them Quinette the bookbinder. Their story is carried on in a further volume, *Childhood's Loves*, to be published next month.